

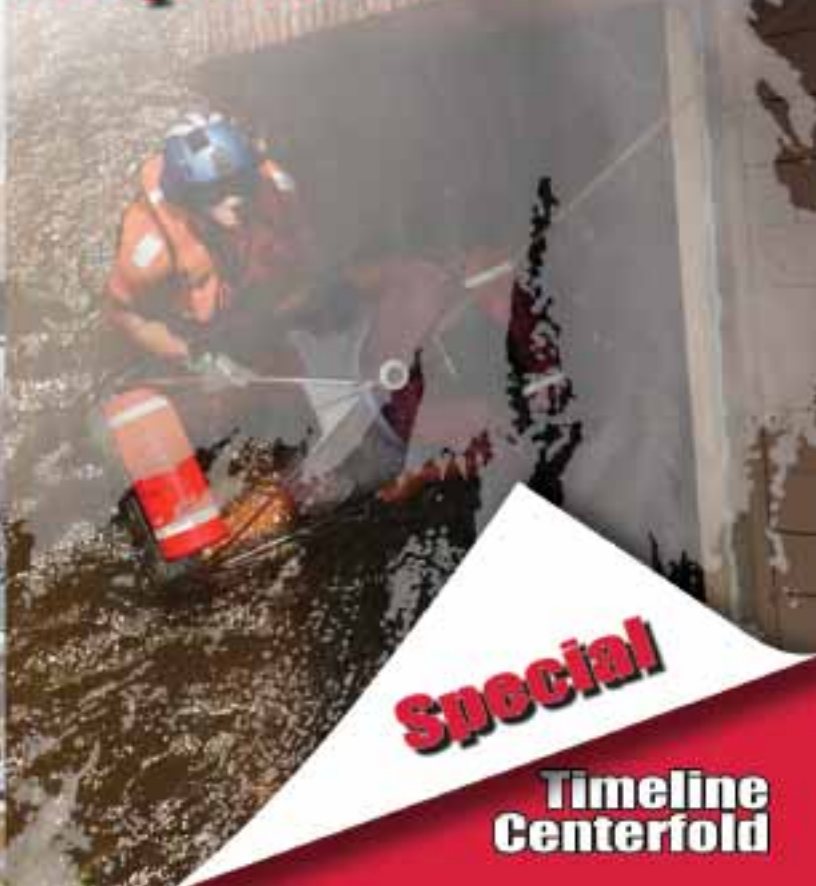
Coast Guard



Special Edition 2005

KATRINA

The Gulf Response



Special

**Timeline
Centerfold**



New Orleans' Saints



THE COMMANDANT OF THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20593-0001

To the Men and Women of the United States Coast Guard,

Since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I have received hundreds of letters and cards from world leaders, citizens, federal agency directors, survivors, the media, Congressmen and Senators – thanking the Coast Guard for our service. Many have asked: How was the Coast Guard able to do what it did in the response and recovery to these devastating storms?

I have but one answer for all of them – the men and women of the United States Coast Guard stuck to the basics. We have a plan. We train and equip to the plan. We execute the plan while maintaining extremely high readiness. And we are blessed with the finest maritime first responders in the world!

Coast Guard men and women routinely demonstrate the spirit and practice of operational initiative. It's a practice that permeates our culture. Coast Guard members are highly trained professionals who are given tremendous responsibility and are expected to exercise sound, independent judgment, especially in the face of crisis. Officers and enlisted personnel exercise this wonderful, necessary quality in our day-to-day operations. It is no surprise that trained initiative would rise in the face of such a disaster.

Team Coast Guard members descended on the devastated city of New Orleans and the Mississippi coastal communities, with winds still howling and in uncertain waters, only to find the utter horror of great spans of country under water, neighborhoods completely flattened by hurricane force winds, and thousands of survivors clinging to rooftops. Every available Coast Guard boat and helicopter immediately launched into action. Our people teamed with first responders from our local and state partners and integrated seamlessly with our DOD counterparts.

And a full 10 days later we had executed one of the largest search and rescue operations in United States history by saving and evacuating more than 33,544 lives. To put this in perspective, in a typical, but nonetheless busy year, we might rescue a little over 5,000 people, so in less than a two week period, the Coast Guard conducted over six years of rescues.

During the same post-Katrina timeframe, the Coast Guard executed our other missions of ensuring safe and secure passage within impacted waterways and responded to pollution cases totaling over 8 million gallons of oil and huge amounts of sewage and toxic chemicals. In fact, cleanup operations continue even as this goes to print.

What makes these events particularly compelling is the fact that the Team Coast Guard members who accomplished all of these amazing feats were also victims of Katrina. Over 28% of the workforce either lost their homes or sustained intense property damage.

I've never been prouder of the Coast Guard. Our team of multi-mission men and women: active duty, reserve, civilian, and auxiliary, are performing brilliantly. Their ability to adapt to a quickly changing operational environment, squeeze excellence out of our over-extended systems, and provide the face of calm, reassuring professionalism to those in dire need embodies who we are: guardians, warriors, patriots, and life savers.

The thousands of men and women from around the Coast Guard who responded to Katrina understood the model and practice of distributed leadership, to get more in performance and presence from themselves and our workforce than that which would be possible from one single leader. They knew that if something needed doing for the good of the mission, they were empowered to just do it.

Sincerely,

THOMAS H. COLLINS
Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard



Coast Guard

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Special Edition



Homeland Security

2005



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On The Cover

Photos by,
Clockwise from
the top left; PA3 Robert Reed,
8th Dist.; PA2 Bobby Nash,
PADET Mayport; PA2 NyxoLyno
Cangemi, 8th Dist.; Lt. j.g Earl
Lingerfelt, MSST 91108.



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Centerfold Timeline



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DAMAGE REPORT

The CGC Decisive moors at the battered port of Gulfport, Miss., serving as a command, control and communications platform for the recently established Mississippi Coastal Recovery Base Gulfport. The base was established to provide assistance to local law enforcement agencies and for search and rescue capabilities, ports and waterways restoration and humanitarian aid.

PHOTO BY PA3 KIP WADLOW, LANTAREA



UP FRONT

DOGGED DETERMINATION

A Coast Guardsman from a Miami-based port security unit holds a Chihuahua he rescued from flood waters in New Orleans. The Coast Guard has rescued untold numbers of pets since the rescue operation began.

PHOTO BY PA3 JEFF POLLINGER, 13TH DIST.



UP FRONT

AIR SUPPORT

NEW ORLEANS — Coast Guard rescue helicopter crews transport equipment and personnel to a command post at the Superdome here, Aug. 29. The HH-60 Jayhawk rescue helicopter crew from Training Center Mobile, Ala., was conducting initial damage assessment and performing search and rescue missions.

PHOTO BY PA1 KYLE NIEMI, 8TH DIST.





FULL FORCE

Story by PA1 Mike O'Berry, G-IPA-1

Winds were still howling above 60 knots when Lt. David Johnston positioned his HH-65 Dolphin helicopter over a half-submerged fishing boat in Port Sulphur, La., for one of Hurricane Katrina's first rescues. It was less than eight hours since the full force of the nation's most destructive natural disaster slammed the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29, and the Coast Guard responded with a full force of its own.

Team Coast Guard wasted little time storming into Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama on the heels of Katrina's landfall. Within hours, air crews from Clearwater, Fla.; Cape Cod, Mass.; Elizabeth City, N.C.; and Houston and Corpus Christi, Texas were arriving to provide air rescue assistance.

By Sept. 1, 25 Coast Guard

cutters, 48 aircraft, two Disaster Area Response Teams, three Maritime Safety and Security Teams, a National Strike Team, Incident Management Assist teams from both Atlantic and Pacific areas, three Port Security Units, six Disaster Area Teams, three Environmental Response Teams and four Critical Incident Stress Management teams

had arrived in the Gulf Coast theatre to help.

"The dogged determination, enthusiasm and eagerness to serve in any capacity exhibited by all members was awesome to behold," wrote Capt. David Callahan, commanding officer of Aviation Training Center Mobile and Capt. Bruce Jones, commanding officer of

Air Station New Orleans in a joint memo to fellow commanding officers.

Heroes from above

Back over Port Sulphur, Johnston and his co-pilot, Lt. Craig Murray, followed the only recognizable terrain feature, the Mississippi River, toward the faint mayday originating from the

small fishing town 40 miles down river from New Orleans. The desperate call was coming from a grandmother who was stranded with her daughter and four-month old prematurely-born granddaughter.

After pinpointing their location from flares fired by the stranded trio, AET2 Warren Labeth lowered rescue swimmer AST3 Lawrence Nettles into



PA2 Nivolvno Camem, 8th Dist.

FIRST RESPONDERS

AET2 Shawn Beaty looks for survivors in the wake of Hurricane Katrina on Aug. 30. Beaty is a member of an HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter rescue crew sent from Air Station Clearwater to assist in search and rescue efforts in and around New Orleans.

the water near the boat.

In the helicopter, torrential rain and an unyielding wind shear gave Johnston and Murray all they could handle. Twice the aircraft settled with no power to spare and recovered only a few feet above trees and power lines. It took two hoists to lift the family to safety. During the third hoist to recover Nettles, a wind gust wrapped the cable in a fallen tree. Labeth coolly handled the hoist, giving Nettles the slack he needed to break branches and free the cable so that he could be lifted to the waiting chopper and on to the next rescue.

This was just one of thousands of demonstrated heroics in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Combined with hospital evacuations and rescues by surface resources, Coast Guard

personnel saved a staggering 33,544 lives. More lives were saved during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita than in the Coast Guard's previous six years combined.

"I have been in search and rescue for 30 years and have never seen anything like this," said AMTCM Tim Sheffler, Air Station New Orleans command master chief. "Our orders were simple: Go and save lives."

U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe remarked, "The bottom line is that members of the Coast Guard did not wait to be told to conduct their mission. They knew their mission, and they refused to let anything get in their way. Indeed, the results are a living testament to the service's efficiency and organization."



ARMED ESCORT

GM3 John Jacobs poses in his ready gear at Coast Guard Station New Orleans. Jacobs is a member of the marine safety office there and provided security for federal agents in the wake of Katrina.

Well trained

The Coast Guard typically trains personnel to rescue people from trees, mountain cliffs, ice floes and sinking ships. And while some members specialize in certain types of operations, they all train to a standard so that they can form up as teams in emergencies.

"We're used to being on big seas and taking people off fishing boats, but this was way different. Now we're taking somebody off a rooftop," said AST2 Scott Rady, a rescue swimmer from Air Station Clearwater, in an interview with ABC News.

At its peak, more than 40 percent

of the Coast Guard's air fleet was involved in one of the largest search and rescue operations in Coast Guard history.

The fact that there were no significant personnel injuries or major aircraft mishaps, even though many crews were flying together for the first time, is simply remarkable.

"The operation's superb safety record is a testament to the leadership, professionalism and skills of each individual participant, and also to the Coast Guard's aviation training, safety and standardization programs we have relied upon for years," wrote Jones and Callahan.

According to Jones and Callahan, the overwhelming success of this complex operation was a true testament to the value of the Coast Guard's Principles of Operations: clear

objective, unity in effort, effective presence, on-scene initiative and flexibility. "If you turn highly-trained and properly equipped Coasties loose on an objective, they will tackle it, and let you know when it is done."

Some of the unsung heroes of aviation were the aircraft maintenance crews, observed Jones and Callahan. "Air crews from every unit commented on the quality and speed of aircraft turnarounds and maintenance. Again, Coast Guard aviation's outstanding training, safety and standardization programs in place at CGHQ, ATTC and AR&SC, and at each individual Air Station enabled maintainers from across the country to instantly form effective

teams at ATC Mobile and at Air Station New Orleans and keep aircraft flying to save lives."

Answering the call

Personnel and equipment from nearly all Coast Guard units answered the call to help.

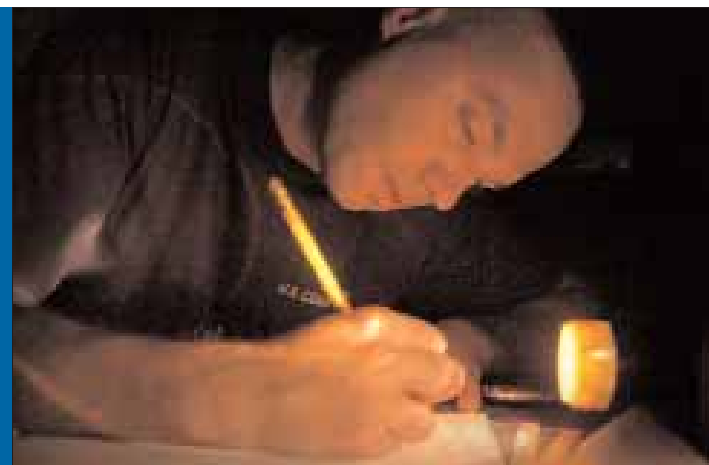
In all, more than 5,000 Coast Guard personnel from around the country participated in the search and rescue, environmental protection response, force protection and waterways reconstitution effort.

The 9th District in particular demonstrated the Coast Guard's flexibility and initiative by sending in three of their ice rescue boats.

The shallow draft and highly maneuverable nature of the ice boats

ARCHAIC ARCHIVING

BM2 Justin Feussner writes down the locations of stranded individuals in need of assistance in the wake of Hurricane Katrina on Aug. 29 at Coast Guard Aviation Training Center Mobile. With electrical power out, Feussner communicates with the Alabama Emergency Operations Center with his cell phone to coordinate search and rescue operations.



made them a near-perfect platform for urban search and rescue teams. They are capable of sliding over land and floating in water and provided an ideal solution for accessing areas helicopters could not reach.

"We felt the ice boats would work well in the flooded streets of New Orleans — but they worked out awesome," said GMCM Patrick O'Kelly, 9th District command master chief.

Always ready

In preparation for Katrina's arrival, the Coast Guard did what it always does in the days before a storm hits: moved its cutters, air planes, helicopters and personnel out of the storm's path.

In accordance with their continuity of operations plan, about 50 of the district staff deployed to St. Louis on Aug. 27, prior to Katrina's landfall. The COOP allowed the staff to manage and support 8th District functions from St. Louis, and there was never a lapse in Coast Guard operational capabilities.

"Our COOP worked fantastically," said Capt. Kevin Marshall, 8th District chief of staff. "Once we were up and running, we were able to effectively respond to the needs of the Gulf Coast before Hurricane Katrina even made landfall."

Strategically positioning resources just outside potential strike zones allowed the Coast Guard to swiftly move in behind Katrina and begin rescuing survivors even while tropical storm winds and rain were still present.

"We started the night that the storm hit," said AST1 Jason Shepard, a rescue swimmer from ATC Mobile.



HIGH & DRY

An estimated 3,000 fishing and work vessels were scattered by the forces of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.



Furthermore, lives were being saved at an unprecedented rate even though almost half the local personnel – 700 in all – lost their own homes and belongings in the storm.

“Despite these hardships, the extraordinary Coast Guard men and women who gathered from all over the Coast Guard to join the fight worked ceaselessly and cheerfully, allowing around the clock SAR and maintenance operations to continue unabated and at an unprecedented level,” wrote Jones and Callahan.

HEAVY LIFTING

SA Karl Mulleady from the Aids to Navigation Team Ft. Lauderdale helps to unload sinkers weighing 70 to 75 pounds. These sinkers are used to hold buoys in place. The ANT arrived in Mississippi over Labor Day weekend and repaired or replaced more than 390 aids. Their efforts helped to open the main shipping channels in and around the ports of Gulfport and Biloxi.



PA3 GRETCHEN EDDY, 7th Dist.

“Crews that normally would be asked to pluck about 20 people from danger on a tough day have been doing 100 to 120 hoists in adverse conditions that include heat and humidity and exposure to contaminated water kicked up by chopper rotors,” Shepard said.

Lt. Iain McConnell, a pilot out of Air Station Clearwater said they shattered their career rescue numbers daily. They transported a prematurely-born infant to a hospital. In another case, McConnell said, they rescued a man from a roof who “told us his wife had drowned in the house below because she couldn’t get out.”

A flight crew from Air Station Atlantic City, led by Cmdr. Dan Taylor, spoke of a nine-month pregnant woman they picked up from the Louisiana Superdome who went into labor in the helicopter. They safely offloaded her at Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport where she delivered her baby.

More than SAR

While dramatic rescues grabbed the headlines, there were hundreds of other personnel working 20-hour days to open integral waterways, clean up oil, rebuild stations, maintain Maritime Transportation Security Act requirements and manage vessel salvage operations.

The Port of New Orleans is the fourth-largest port in the world in terms of raw tonnage, and is among the largest ports in the U.S. for important commodities such as petroleum, cement and coffee. So getting the ports open was a top priority and a huge undertaking.

The Sector New Orleans Aids to Navigation Team answered the call with help from several units outside 8th District by replacing or repairing more than 2,700 ATON discrepancies in less than a month.

“At first, it was difficult to comprehend the extent of the

FLIGHT REPAIR

AMT1 Will Ernestburg works on the electronic communications system of an HH-65 Dolphin helicopter at ATC Mobile on Sept. 4. Ernestburg was sent from Coast Guard Air Station Miami to assist in post-hurricane response.



PA2 BOBBY NASH, 10th Dist.



PA2 BOBBY NASH, 10th Dist.

SHARP RESCUERS

Disaster Area Response Teams and their 16-foot aluminum flat bottom boats were the best means for ferrying urban search and rescue teams and supplies to flooded neighborhoods. DARTs came from Paducah, Ky.; Huntington, W.Va.; St. Louis; Houston; Pittsburgh; Sector Ohio Valley; and Port Arthur, Texas to help rescue more than 6,000 hurricane survivors.

damage, let alone identify a place to start repairs,” said CWO Steve Craddock, Sector Miami Aids to Navigation officer. The 7th District ATON team spent two weeks repairing aids in the Gulfport and Biloxi, Miss., area.

“The days were long,” said BM3 Christopher Batton, from ANT Charleston. “We would be up with the sun, and there were times we didn’t finish until midnight.”

An estimated 3,000 fishing and work vessels were unceremoniously scattered by the powerful forces of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Boats

of every size and function littered marinas and residential neighborhoods, canals and highways. The arduous task of cleaning up the mess rests with the Coast Guard’s Wreck and Salvage Group, who say it could take six months or more to clean it all up.

The hurricanes also paralyzed the oil and gas infrastructure throughout the region requiring a pollution response covering 130 miles of rivers, canals and wetlands.

An estimated 8 million gallons of product were spilled along the Mississippi River basin.

Approximately 750 responders from federal, state and local agencies are assisting in the cleanup.



PA2 BOBBY NASH, 10th Dist.

HELPING HAND

Coast Guard personnel help New Orleans residents off a barge ferrying stranded survivors to safer areas of the devastated city of New Orleans on Sept. 1. About 700 residents an hour were transported to the Algiers, La., ferry landing.

Shocking sight

New Orleans long has been associated with Cajun food, sultry blues and a beguiling Southern history that have always earned a lasting place in visitors’ memories.

To many, the complete and utter destruction of whole neighborhoods was the most shocking aspect. In New Orleans alone, an estimated 22 million tons of debris — an amount 15 times the collapse of the World Trade Center — awaits removal, say federal officials.

There to document the relief effort, PA2 Bobby Nash from Mayport, Fla., described scenes where the water reached the 12-foot mark in St. Bernard Parish.

“I don’t think anyone can prepare themselves for something like this,” said Nash. “It was like a movie. The military was everywhere, thousands upon thousands of people were stacked in a warehouse for safety, and there was debris everywhere.”

Images of tangled power lines and trucks suspended from trees were a testament to his recollections. Like



some crazy artist's rendering, cars and boats ended up in places too unusual to comprehend.

As the brown muddy water rose to roofline level, Nash recalls snaking his way through downed power lines and endless high water. Some of the homes bore spray-painted messages left by search and rescue crews. The markings delineated dates, times, number of bodies found, pets rescued — large scrawlings as a grim reminder of the unleashed power of natural forces.

Despite some of the chaotic, dangerous and often surreal things Nash and dozens of deployed Coast Guard men and women witnessed, there were unexpected pockets of humanity. For Nash, it was a simple gesture from a couple who stopped to zip an open pouch on his backpack.

"All they had were the clothes on their backs, and here they were concerned about my pack," said Nash. "Even though there were things going on that seemed inhumane, there were people who had lost everything who were gracious and caring."

As Snowe said, "The heroic efforts of our nation's military personnel and civilian volunteers during this time of crisis have not gone unnoticed. Their acts of bravery and selflessness have been truly inspiring. What I saw and heard is a story of heroism and a relentless 'can-do' attitude that is nothing short of miraculous."

District staff returns home

On Nov. 1 — two months after Hurricane Katrina plowed ashore — more than 150 members of the 8th District staff returned to their offices in downtown New Orleans.

"We're glad to be home so we can continue to help restore the Gulf Coast region, as well as give our own people who were impacted by Katrina the time they need to take care of their personal business and their families," said Marshall. 🇺🇸

Editor's Note: PA2 Judy Silverstein, USCGR; PA2 NyxoLyno Cangemi, 8th Dist.; and PA3 Matthew Schofield, 9th Dist., contributed to this story.



RITA RESCUES

Two Coast Guard HH-60 Jayhawk crews take off from Houston early on Sept. 25, the morning after Hurricane Rita made landfall. The crews searched for people needing to be rescued in the affected areas and provided needed supplies to other Coast Guard units.

PA2 Andrew Kaurick, PADET Houston

Hacking, Smashing and Dashing

Rescuers test
their limits,
improvise
to save
thousands in
record time

Story by PA2 NyxoLyno Cangemi,
8th Dist.

In the weeks that followed Hurricane Katrina, the images being showcased by the media were hard to miss — helicopter rescue crews hoisting survivors off rooftops in the flooded city of New Orleans. Trapped in flooded homes surrounded by turbid water, Hurricane Katrina survivors looked to the sky for hope and found the unmistakable orange rescue helicopters of the Coast Guard.

For the men and women of the Coast Guard, rescuing people from a city nicknamed “The Big Easy” proved anything but. Conventional methods of rescue gave way to improvisation and ingenuity. If hurricane victims were to survive, rescue crews needed to discover new methods of rescue and adapt to the urban setting.

Pilots and flight mechanics conducted hoists in obstacle-strewn environments, often through night vision goggles, over power lines and downed trees. Swimmers faced flooded houses and buildings; steep, slippery roofs; foul and contaminated water, and the need to hack through attics with axes or break out windows to free survivors.

With marked urgency, tired and emotionally-taxed crews



PA2 NYXOLYNO CANGEMI, 8TH DIST.

UP, UP AND AWAY

AET2 Scott Rady gives the signal to hoist a pregnant woman from her apartment in New Orleans on Aug. 30. Rady is a rescue swimmer sent from Clearwater, Fla., to help aid in SAR efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

rescued a seemingly endless number of survivors. Air crews returned from missions with dozens of rescues on a single sortie. One HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter out of ATC Mobile completed its day’s work with 150 lives saved.

The “Ax” Man

On the first day of rescue operations, AST2 Joel Sayers, from Air Training Center Mobile, found himself in a compromising position when he was lowered onto a rooftop to rescue an older woman stranded by the rising floodwater.

The noise and constant downward air pressure coming from the HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter were nothing new to Sayers; however, the sloped roof and

flying shingles presented new hazards to the rescue swimmer who normally works in open water.

When he landed, Sayers began talking to the frightened woman and learned that her husband was still in the attic of their house, unable to move. Sayers looked through the small opening in the roof the woman had managed to escape through and saw the woman’s husband. After several failed attempts to widen the hole and free the man using the helicopter’s crash ax, Sayers knew he needed something with more weight and strength if he was to save the man trapped inside.

“I knew I had to do something to get him out of there,” Sayers recalled. “I looked through the hole in the roof and told the man ‘I promise you, I will come back to get you.’”



SHARP PENMANSHIP

AST1 Craig Miller signs an ax on Sept. 3 at the Coast Guard Aviation Training Center in Mobile, Ala. Air crews from around the country signed the ax as a symbol of the unorthodox methods they used to rescue victims and will display the ax at the ATC in memory of those they rescued – and those they couldn't.

Sayers tied off a brightly colored piece of cloth around one of the house's vent pipes and convinced the wife she had to — at least for now — leave her husband behind. Sayers and his survivor were hoisted to the helicopter and taken to a nearby, makeshift landing zone the aircrew had established earlier that day.

"When we landed, I asked one of the crew members to find me something to cut through the roof with," Sayers said. "When he returned, he had a fire ax he got from a fireman."

Once they gathered the supplies they needed, the aircrew returned to the neighborhood with the woman still aboard. "I knew finding the house was going to be difficult, even with the helicopter's Global Positioning System – everything looked the same," Sayers said. "That's why I tied the cloth to the pipe."

Once the house was located, Sayers was again lowered to the roof – this time, fire ax in hand.

"I looked back into the hole in the roof, and the husband looked surprised to see me," Sayers recalled. "He was either surprised I came back, or he was in shock. Sadly, I think he was a little bit of both."

Over the thunderous noise of the rescue helicopter hovering above them, Sayers yelled to the man to move away from the opening.

"I just started with the ax and kept chopping through the roof until it was big enough to pull him out," Sayers recalled.

Once the man was pulled to safety from the humid attic, he was hoisted into the helicopter and reunited

with his wife.

"Looking over the city, you could see how grateful the couple was, not only to be rescued, but to be alive," Sayers said.

A brief portion of Sayer's heroic rescue was captured by another crew member and seen by millions when every national media outlet in the country broadcast the 15-second video clip. In addition, ABC News honored Sayers by naming him Person of the Week.

"The title was honorary," Sayers said. "All of us were doing what we are trained to do — it's our job. I accepted the title on behalf of everyone working to save those affected by the hurricane. In a sense, ABC didn't name me the Person of the Week – the title was given to the Coast Guard in honor of what we, as an organization, were doing. This was a team effort."

Sayers' rescue prompted the Coast Guard's immediate purchase of fire axes. Every rescue swimmer from that point on carried a fire ax in



addition to their standard issue gear.

"When Hurricane Katrina made landfall, the men and women of the Coast Guard answered the call of duty with pride," said Capt. Bruce Jones, commanding officer of Coast Guard Air Station New Orleans. "The service's core values of honor, respect and devotion to duty became the battle cry that drove these individuals to test their strengths and challenge their weaknesses."

Jones added, "Despite the great challenges they faced, these men and women successfully accomplished their mission — saving the lives of those who cannot save themselves." 🇺🇸

SAFETY BOUND

A Coast Guard flight mechanic maneuvers a hoist during one of thousands of air rescues conducted in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. At the peak of operations, more than 40 percent of the entire Coast Guard air fleet was working along the southern Gulf coast. Personnel from Hawaii, Alaska, Massachusetts, Florida and all points in between gathered to assist in

Ingenuity keeps helos humming

Story and Photo
by PA3 Kelly Newlin, 1st Dist.

Hurricane Katrina heroes bring certain images to mind. Some of those images include rescue swimmers with axes in their hands breaking through rooftops to save people, and children wrapped in the arms of rescue swimmers being hoisted up into Coast Guard helicopters. During the Katrina relief efforts, heroes came from all over, including the men and women keeping aircraft in the air, boats in the water and ensuring an uninterrupted supply line.

EM2 Rodney Gordon and MK1 Daniel Mitchell, stationed at Air Station New Orleans, are two of these heroes. The two used their ingenuity and perseverance to overcome several obstacles to maintain the Air Station, which became a staging area for the largest air search and rescue mission in Coast Guard history.

Gordon and other air station personnel started returning to New Orleans on HH-65 Dolphin helicopters in 80-knot winds two hours after the deadly hurricane passed over on Aug. 29. The crews found the air station in disarray.

“As we landed, I saw parts of the hanger and debris all over the air field. It was a mess,” he said.

Gordon spent the next few hours clearing debris off the runway in tropical storm conditions. His next task was to find replacement generators.

Gordon and Mitchell scoured the Belle Chasse Navy Air Base for generators. Buildings were destroyed, trees and debris lay everywhere as they kept searching for anything usable.



BEHIND-THE-SCENES HERO

EM2 Rodney Gordon, from Coast Guard Air Station New Orleans, stands in front of the Belle Chasse Naval Air Base fuel farm Sept. 12. He re-powered the fuel farm after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the base Aug. 29.

Gordon and Mitchell did find a few generators. They spent the rest of the day and into the night wiring and rewiring and switching them out to maintain power. Another priority was fueling helicopters.

“To begin with, we only had one fuel truck holding 5,000 gallons — enough for 20 helicopters,” said Gordon. “The air station was so short staffed everyone was helping fuel helicopters including our Executive Officer, Cmdr. Scott Kitchen, and Operations Officer, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Tobiasz. We had aircraft from all over the country coming in. At one point, the entire airfield was covered by Coast Guard aircraft.”

Gordon went to the Navy’s fuel farm in search of additional fuel for the helicopters. The Navy gave the air station the keys to the remaining seven fuel trucks and

when he arrived he found the trucks sitting in five feet of fuel.

Gordon along with others drove the trucks to the landing strip and started the task of keeping aircraft fueled to fly search and rescue missions.

The next morning all of the other military branches began returning to the base and that’s when the Navy realized they had run into a problem. The fuel farm, which fed all Department of Defense aircraft and Coast Guard aircraft, was without power.

Gordon faced his next obstacle. Being the only electrician on base, he was tasked with making the fuel farm operable. “This wasn’t something I was used to working on,” said Gordon.

Countless challenges lay ahead. Throughout the many hours after the hurricane, Gordon used every

piece of wire he had in his shop keeping generators running and now he was completely out. Gordon and Mitchell once again had to go and search the base.

They finally came across wire in a SeaBee engineering shop. They also found a generator on the side of a building and used it to restore power to the fuel farm. It was no easy feat, considering the generator was so heavy it had to be moved with a fork lift. After 11 hours of wiring and rewiring and trou-


bleshooting the fuel farm, Gordon and Mitchell were able to restore operating power.

“Without their efforts, we would have had to move our operations 40 miles outside of New Orleans,” said Tobiasz. “We would’ve burned half our fuel reaching the city and wouldn’t have been able to search nearly as long.”

Gordon and Mitchell worked about 21 hours a day for the first three days. According to Tobiasz, their ingenuity contributed to the

Coast Guard’s most successful air search and rescue mission.

“We all worked together as a team. My part of the team came very early on,” Gordon said, “I was just doing my job.”

Due to the efforts of many heroes like Gordon and Mitchell, the Coast Guard saved more than 33,500 lives following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. During the first three days after Katrina, more than 6,300 lives were saved by air crews flying out of Air Station New Orleans. 

A bird’s eye view

Story by
PA2 NyxoLyno Cangemi, 8th Dist.

Looking out of an Army Blackhawk helicopter over the flooded city in which he was born and raised was not how BM1 Nicholas “Fonzie” Alphonso envisioned spending part of his tour at Coast Guard Station New Orleans. As he looked out at his hurricane-ravaged hometown, Alphonso had one objective – to find a way for Coast Guardsmen to maneuver their boats safely around the city.

Days before Hurricane Katrina made landfall and when other station personnel began evacuating the area, Alphonso stayed behind to ensure the small boat station nestled along the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, La., would sustain as little damage as possible. When his duties as the station’s officer of the day were complete, Alphonso packed up his belongings and evacuated the city with his wife.

Once Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Alphonso left his wife with family members in Arkansas and proceeded to make the trip back to the station.

With the station’s power out, the operations center was running on generator power. Armed with police-band radios, Alphonso listened in to what the other agencies were doing.

In order to understand the severity of the situation that lay before him, Alphonso decided he needed to get a bird’s-eye view of the city. With most of the Coast Guard’s air fleet rescuing survivors, Alphonso went to the Army Corps of Engineers for help.

“I approached an Army general and asked if he

could get me up in the Blackhawk helicopter to conduct an overflight assessment,” Alphonso said. “After the general made a few phone calls to get the approval, we were able to take off to get a better view of the area.” When he returned to the station, Alphonso gathered the station’s crew to view a video that was recorded during their flight. “Nothing looked the same, but we looked at the video and discussed different ways we could get in and out of the city.”

Low bridges coupled with high floodwaters and debris made the usual passage for the station’s boats difficult. “We had to use flat-bottom boats because our regular boats wouldn’t fit under any of the bridges,” Alphonso said.

Armed with a strategy to navigate through the waterways, boat crews set out to assist in any way they could. “One of the things we did was transport about 2,500 people from an evacuation point near the University of New Orleans to our station,” Alphonso recalled. “When we first arrived there, people were rushing down to our boats. We had to organize them into a line and pat them down for weapons. When we got back to the station, cattle trucks were used to transport them to a gathering point on the interstate where the Red Cross took care of them.”

The Coast Guard was faced with many new challenges in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. For Alphonso, that meant finding new ways to make the most of the station’s resources. The Blackhawk helicopter overflight Alphonso orchestrated enabled the crew of Station New Orleans to develop new ways to maneuver their boats through waterways they traveled so many times before.

“I never thought I would lose everything I owned,” Alphonso mused. “I always knew that there was a chance of a hurricane hitting New Orleans, but I never thought I would be here to see it happen.”



In Shallow Waters

Disaster Area Response Teams ply the murky waters of flooded New Orleans searching for survivors

Story by PA Kelly Newlin, Staff District

Cars and foreign debris submerged in the toxic waters from Lake Pontchartrain, La., surrounded MK1 Mike Adams Sept. 12, while aboard one of the Coast Guard Disaster Area Response Team's 16-foot flood boats.

A Colorado-based urban search and rescue team working with DART under FEMA joined Adams as he cautiously maneuvered through flooded neighborhoods looking for survivors.

Through extreme conditions,

DART members pushed through physical and psychological hardships. These active duty and reserve members played an important role in the Katrina relief efforts.

Search and rescue became critical as days turned into weeks and the survival rate of those who made it through the hurricane became slim. People were trapped in their homes without food and water battling extreme temperatures.

As Adams passed through the

flooded neighborhood that day in Evelyn Fields, he witnessed something he wouldn't forget.

"We were told to check on this house to look for survivors. Across the street we saw another team pulling a 71-year-old man out of his attic. He looked tired but happy to be rescued," said Adams.

DARTs suffered through merciless conditions caused by heat, obstacles beneath the water and lack of area knowledge.

"The heat index was around 101 degrees on some days, and there

SEARCHING FOR SURVIVORS

Disaster Area Response Teams go door-to-door and roof-to-roof searching for Hurricane Katrina survivors. The DARTs worked hand-in-hand with various search and rescue agencies to save more than 6,000 stranded residents and provide food and water to more than 1,500 residents who chose to stay in their homes.



was a lot of sewage and odor from death, rot and mold,” said Adams. “It was really uncomfortable and horrifying because we heard there could be harmful substances in the water, and there we were in it.”

“Every now and then, you would hear the bottom of the boat scrape, and we’d have to pull up our outboard to keep from damaging the props,” said Adams. “It would normally be the roof of a car or a fire hydrant.”

They were careful of debris, and even more cautious of poisonous snakes and alligators within the waters of Louisiana. “One of my guys thought he saw a small alligator start to come up to the boat,” said Lt. Cmdr. Mike Ferrullo, Disaster Area Response Team commander.

Cautiously, the team moved to the other side of the boat, when one of the locals laughed and said it was just a toy. The three-foot plastic alligator became our mascot. “We called it Zephyr after the New Orleans baseball team the Zephyrs, and because we were staged out of Zephyr Field,” said Ferullo.

Not only did the members of DART have to worry about unforeseen hazards in the flooded neighborhoods, but also the horrific scenes of the victims of the hurricane. Despite all of that, they were still eager to help.

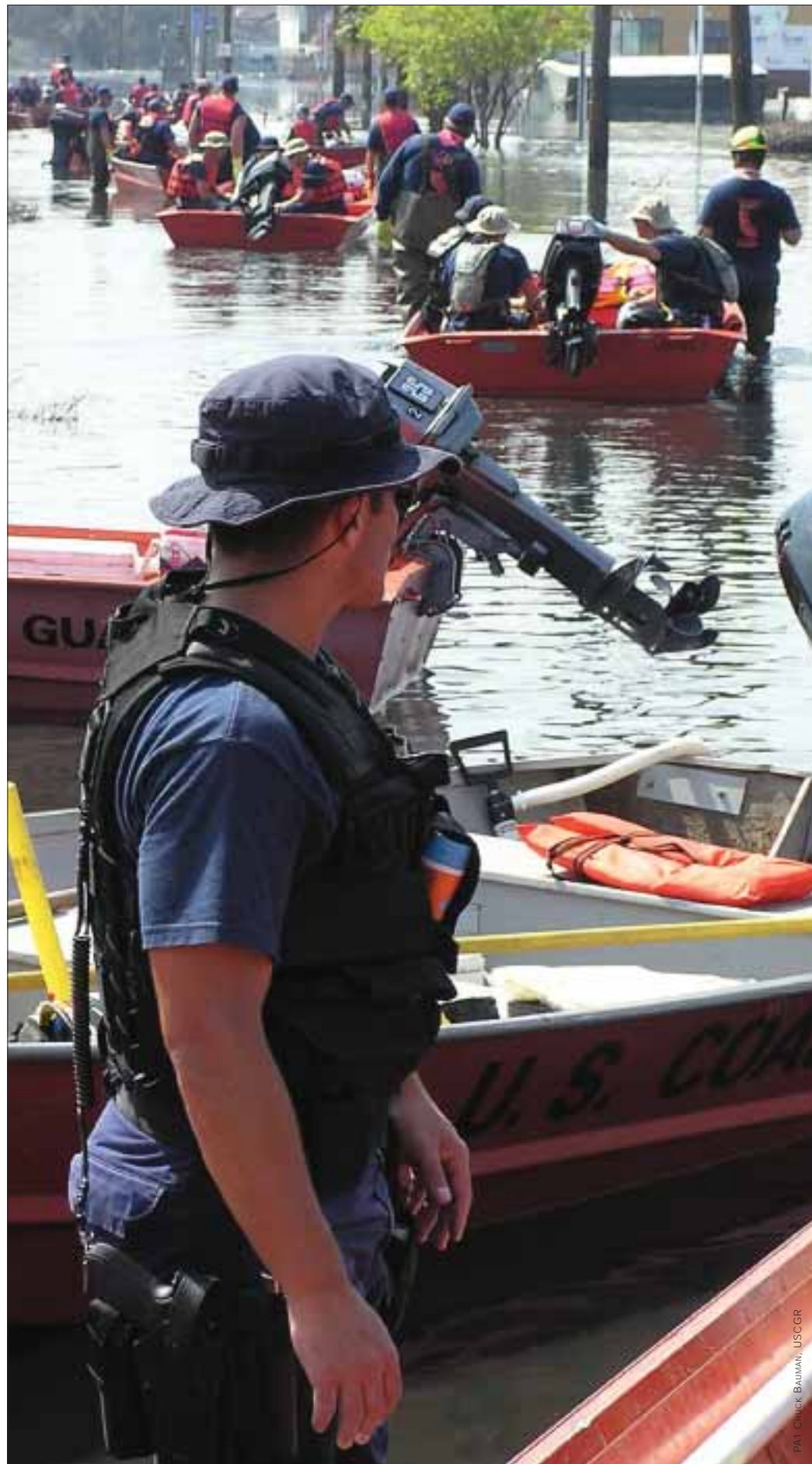
Adams and Ferullo both agreed, no matter how bad the conditions were, members of DART were eager to return and assist survivors. “People were lined up when the boats were loaded hoping to be chosen for that mission and eager to help,” said Adams.



PA3 ROBERT REED, 8TH DIST.

LEAP TO SAFETY

A hurricane survivor jumps to land after being rescued from his flooded home by members of the Sector Ohio Valley DART.



PA1 CHUCK BAUMAN, USCGR



PA1 CHUCK BAUMAN, USCGR



USCG Photo

TEAM EFFORT

Active duty and reserve units from as far away as Alaska and Maine descended on New Orleans to help with Hurricane Katrina rescue operations. At the height of operations 50 of the 16-foot aluminum flat bottom punt boats were the only assets capable of ferrying rescuers and supplies to flooded neighborhoods.

Sending the Reserve

Story by Cmdr. Scott McKinley, Port Security Unit 309



PAT DANIELLE DiMARINO, PADET ST. PETERSBURG

SERVICE TO OTHERS

Ensign Robert Vespi of PSU 309 presents Carolyn Ramsey with family photos he retrieved from her home in Gulfport, Miss., Sept 15. Ramsey's home, as did her neighbor's home pictured here, suffered extensive damage from Hurricane Katrina.

PSU 309 had already been preparing for a mid-September training period when the commanding officer of the Port Clinton, Ohio, unit received a call Sept. 1 asking if they were ready to deploy to the Gulf Coast for hurricane relief.

On Sept. 2, the official recall went out. During the next 24 hours, 120 reservists from six Midwestern states reported to PSU 309's home base to prepare for duty.

The unit learned it would be going to Gulfport, Miss., an area that had been in the path of the devastating storm. It also became apparent that Station Gulfport had been totally destroyed with only the roof and steel frames remaining after the storm.

Almost 100 tons of unit gear, boats and weapons were loaded onto five semi-trailers, five government vehicles and three charter buses. The convoy to Gulfport took almost 20 hours.

Upon arrival, the unit immediately set up a self-contained tent city for berthing on the Navy SeaBee's training base three miles from the Gulf of Mexico.

The effects of the hurricane were overwhelming. The smell of raw sewage permeated the air. Trees were torn from the ground, rooftops were shredded, power lines were down everywhere, and there was no electricity.

The 95-degree daytime temperatures added misery to the refugees and relief workers who were pouring into the area.

The 20-foot storm surge had completely devastated everything within a quarter mile of the water. Semi-trailers were wrapped around trees, refrigerators were floating in the rivers, vessels of all kinds were scattered in fields and tree lines, with many sunk in the numerous inland bays and rivers.

PSU 309 personnel were assigned to work for Sector Mobile and took the job of relieving Station Gulfport personnel so that they could attend to their families and begin the work of rebuilding their station.

PSU 308, homeported in Gulfport, Miss., though scattered and still in the process of tracking down their crew, assisted in the effort,

setting up much needed logistics.

Members of PSU 309 patrolled the waters of the Pearl River, Bay St. Louis and the Back Bay of Biloxi looking for those in need of assistance.

In the Back Bay area, they handed out MRE's and water to more than 200 stranded Vietnamese shrimp fishermen. Several of the boats within this fleet had sunk during the storm.

PSU 309 security personnel patrolled the storm damaged Gulfport pier while rebuilding efforts began at the new station.

Many PSU 309 personnel were moved by the devastation and suffering that they saw and volunteered to hand out supplies and MREs during their off-duty hours. Over 50,000 pounds of supplies were handed out during relief efforts.

The crew also formed several work parties and assisted local Coast Guardsmen whose houses had been damaged by the storm's wrath. They had to rip

out water-damaged drywall and insulation and haul it away. They also assisted in locating personal effects strewn about by the hurricane.

Though PSU 309 logged over 400 patrols and over 1,000 hours of underway time in the four weeks in Gulfport, many of the crew felt that their most important memories were of directly assisting those affected by the hurricane.

They would not soon forget handing out food to the stranded Vietnamese fishermen; helping to clean out another Coast Guardsman's damaged house; or, upon learning that Station Gulfport had lost their canine mascot in the hurricane, they donated a new mascot, "Charlie," a mixed breed dog with a hurricane-induced broken leg.

These were the memories that the crew would be taking back home to Ohio after their efforts in Gulfport after Hurricane Katrina. ☘



PAT DANIELLE DiMARINO, PADET ST. PETERSBURG

HELPING HAND

PS1 Steve Hornyak of Port Security Unit 309 hands out ice to people after Hurricane Katrina. PSU 309 crewmembers conducted more than 20 humanitarian missions while camped in Gulfport, Miss.

Ice Boat

Summer

Story by Lt Paul Fawcett, USCGR, Sector Detroit

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Coast Guard responded with hundreds of personnel and multiple resource types: aircraft, cutters, vehicles, small boats and ice boats. Ice boats aren't a common resource at most Coast Guard units. However in the 9th District, where the Great Lakes can freeze for months each year, a program was developed using ice boats for operations, including search and rescue, law enforcement and homeland security.

The shallow draft and easy maneuverability of the ice boats makes them an ideal platform for urban rescue, and they proved effective in New Orleans.

Ice boats resemble air boats used in the Florida everglades but are specially modified for ice rescue.

Knowing the value of the ice boats for the special challenges in urban flood rescue, the 9th District offered ice boat assistance to the 8th District, and the offer was quickly accepted.

Sector Detroit put together a team of ice boat coxswains and crews from several stations including personnel from Station Saginaw River, Station Port Huron, Station St. Clair Shores, Station Belle Isle, Station Harbor Beach, Station Toledo, Station Marblehead, Station East Tawas and Aids to Navigation Team Detroit.

Once on scene, Sector Detroit personnel joined forces with an ice boat crew from Station Sturgeon Bay and integrated into the Great Lakes SAR Detachment. After linking up with the larger 9th District detachment, personnel from Stations Manistee, Sault Ste. Marie and Buffalo also augmented the ice boat crews.

Immediately recognizing the usefulness of the ice

boats, troops from the Army 82nd Airborne Division approached the ice boat crews the night they arrived at their base camp at Naval Support Activity New Orleans.

The Army was conducting urban rescue operations and wanted to team up with the ice boat crewmembers. This began a partnership that saw 82nd Airborne troops riding along with Coast Guard crews to carry out urban search and rescue.

The ice boats also drew the attention from the news media and from the commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division, both of whom accompanied the crews. The ice boats enabled the media and senior officers to assess damage and humanitarian needs up close.

Crews were stretched to their personal and professional limits. They worked long hours in dirty water and in the midst of terrible human tragedy.

Ice boat maneuverability enabled crews to find isolated pockets of citizens in homes and other buildings where they had sought shelter and offer them transportation to safety.

Many remaining New Orleans residents were in shock or ill from lack of food and water. Crews were forced to use their training to gently convince citizens to accompany them to safety.

All deployed ice boat crews consisted of qualified boarding officers and boarding team members. The operational commander made use of the joint Army-Coast Guard team to search buildings and declare them clear. The joint teams quickly melded their tactical procedures to form an effective method to quickly and safely search abandoned apartment buildings, schools and hospitals for survivors left behind.

When ice boats were purchased for ice rescue on the Great Lakes in February 2005, no one could have conceived of their use for a mass rescue operation like Hurricane Katrina.

BLAST OF FRESH AIR

9th District Coast Guard personnel accompanied by members of the Army 82nd Airborne Division search for survivors from the deck of an ice boat. The ice boats were used to rescue people stranded in the flooded streets of New Orleans.

GMCN Patrick O'Kelly, 9th Dist.

Ice Boats



PA3 SUSAN BLAKE, USCGR



GLICM Patrick OKelly, 9th Dist.



PA3 SUSAN BLAKE, USCGR



SCOTT SHAW, PLANE DEALER, CLEVELAND, OHIO



PA3 SUSAN BLAKE, USCGR

Story by PA 3 M at the Shore, 9th Dist.

Even amid the tragedy in the Gulf area, there was hope, and it came in the form of Coast Guard rescue personnel from all over the country.

One particular team came from various units in the Great Lakes. It was a 42-member team that provided three ice boats and the crews to support them.

The 9th Coast Guard District sent three of its ice boats from the Great Lakes area to help rescue people from places that helicopters could not reach.

The ice boats have a fan above water instead of a propeller that drags underneath, which could get

fouled or hit submerged objects. Using an ice boat in the Great Lakes, crews can slide over ice and float in the water to rescue people that have fallen through the ice.

The Coast Guard team opened up great rescue potential because of the versatility of the small ice boats.

Boat coxswains used them to get to places that the helicopter crews could not reach.

In total, the Great Lakes SAR team saved 126 people and 50 animals with their ice boats. 🐾



Allen's Wrench

NEXT MOVE

Vice Adm. Thad Allen and Lt. Gen. Russel Honore are shown during a press conference focusing on the evacuation plans for Hurricane Rita Sept. 21. Photo by Jocelyn Augustino, FEMA

Story by James Kitfield,
National Journal
Photos by FEMA





Standing in a deserted air terminal in the early morning dark of Sept. 14, America's man of the moment realized that his honeymoon had lasted not quite 24 hours.

The newspapers in Coast Guard Vice Adm. Thad Allen's hands all led with criticisms from the Louisiana governor that the federal government was failing to retrieve bodies from the fetid waters that still engulfed New Orleans. The apparent failure to recover the bodies was adding insult and yet another grievance to the many injuries that Louisianans had already suffered.

Allen had spent most of the previous day with President Bush, who had just named him the "principal federal official" in charge of the Hurricane Katrina rescue-and-recovery effort. Some in the White House wanted Allen to severely chastise Gov. Kathleen Blanco. But polls already showed that a clear majority of Americans disapproved of the way officials at all levels of government, including Bush, were handling the recovery effort. Another circular firing squad by federal, state and local officials wasn't going to help matters.

Instead, Allen called Blanco and in his reasonable style asked her, "Governor, have I done something to give you the impression that I'm interested in anything else but helping the people of Louisiana?"

In truth, Allen had already interceded with a reluctant Pentagon to deploy military mortuary units to New Orleans, and these units even then were engaged in the grim business of retrieving the bodies of Katrina's

victims.

Although Blanco quickly softened her criticism, the incident was clearly a harbinger of more friction to come.

In times of war or crisis, the nation always looks for a leader to step forward and take charge, and usually that someone is in uniform. In the American pantheon, such men of action are accorded special honor, but potential failure and ignominy beckon as well. Consider Generals Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell in Operation Desert Storm.

Then think of Gen. William Westmoreland in Vietnam.

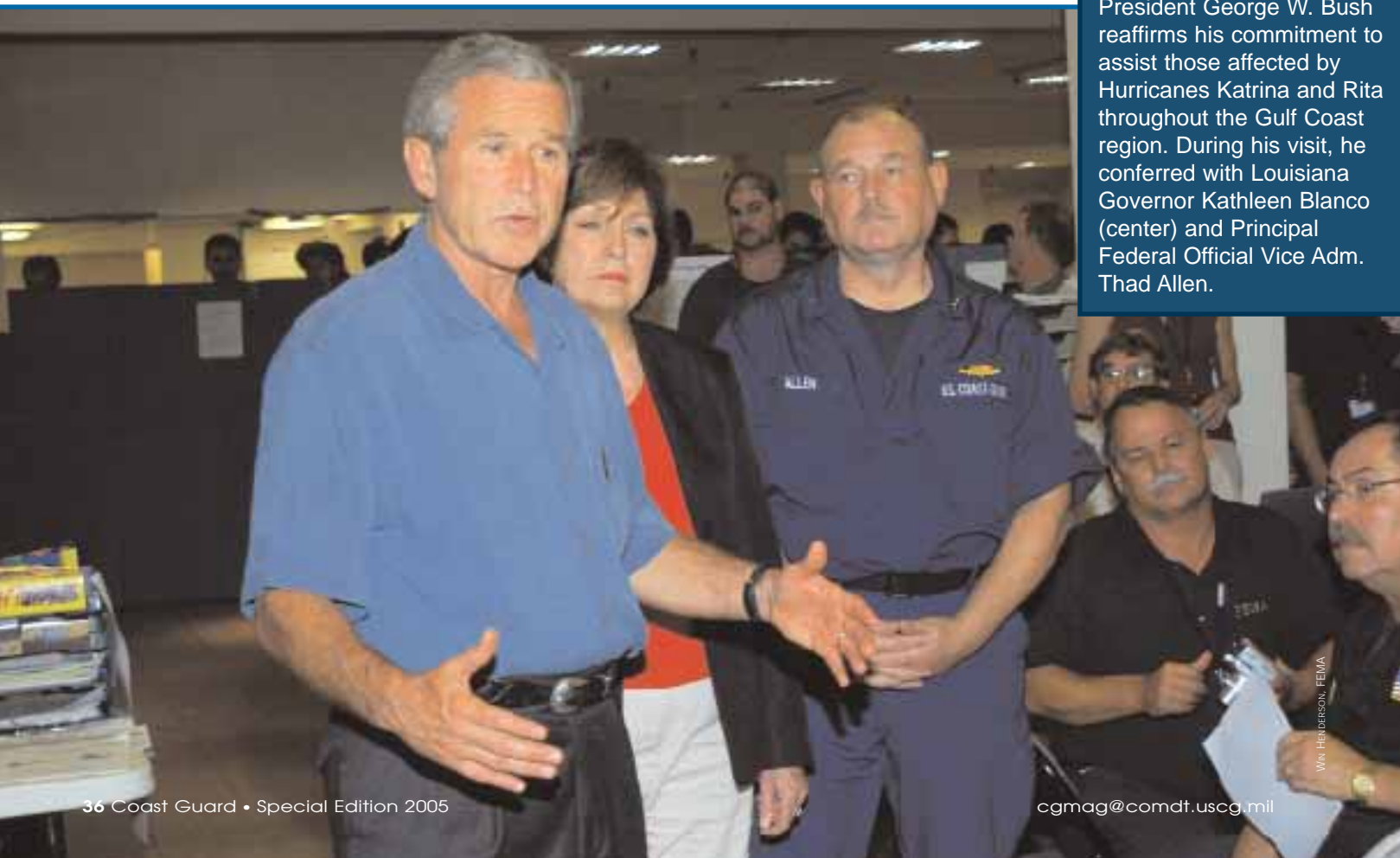
Certainly Thad Allen didn't have to be warned about the perils of his new position. He had watched firsthand as his predecessor, FEMA Director Michael Brown, was replaced and publicly humiliated.

Allen, an officer known for engendering fierce loyalty in his subordinates, had called a number of the most trusted and competent officers who have worked for him before — officers his grandfather would have called "dogs that could hunt." Some on his newly assembled team warned Allen that he was taking on a nearly impossible task from a very exposed position — the admiral was becoming the most recognizable face in a disaster of historic proportions.

The position would surely draw Allen into the maelstrom of partisan politics surrounding the relief effort, and make him a lightning rod for mayors

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

During a visit to the Joint Field Office Sept. 25, President George W. Bush reaffirms his commitment to assist those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita throughout the Gulf Coast region. During his visit, he conferred with Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco (center) and Principal Federal Official Vice Adm. Thad Allen.



and governors already enraged by the federal government's halting response. Congressional investigations were under way, with more sure to follow. Everyone understood that the response to Hurricane Katrina was a milestone in modern American governance and politics, and would be dissected for years to come for the lessons at the heart of the tragedy. Only a certain kind of person would want to put his arms around such a catastrophe.

Thad Allen, however, had an oft-used saying that would guide him in this crisis: Transparency breeds self-correcting behavior. He would open the process up, shine the light of media scrutiny on the entire recovery project, and let the American people judge their efforts.

As the onsite coordinator in New Orleans for the past week, Allen had also become acquainted with a former Marine colonel named Terry Ebbert, the director of homeland security for the city of New Orleans. Ebbert weathered Katrina's fury inside New Orleans, and the impact of seeing the city plunged into almost primordial darkness in the space of just 48 hours was etched onto his features. The first thing that Allen asked Ebbert was what he needed most from the federal government.

"We need hope," Ebbert replied.

When Allen's small Coast Guard Citation jet lifted off from Washington Dulles International Airport, the Northern Virginia countryside was cloaked in fog that hung in the trees and filled the valleys with pools of mist. Sunrise was just a splash of color on the horizon. The man of the hour was slipping out of the nation's capital virtually unnoticed, accompanied by an entourage consisting of one junior aide and a National Journal reporter along for the ride.

Thad Allen had his marching orders directly from the president: Speed the federal response to Katrina. Cut through the red tape. Solve problems before they bubble up into the press as controversies. Almost before the Citation's landing gear retracted, Allen was nodding to sleep in an effort to steal a short nap following a long line of 16-to-18-hour days.

To the president's list of goals he had added one of his own. Allen intended to live up to the promise he'd made to the former Marine colonel: He would give New Orleans

and the Gulf Coast reason to hope. That's a lifesaving mission any Coast Guardsman could embrace.

Hierarchy of need

When Bush reached down to choose the No. 3 official in the Coast Guard to manage the Katrina recovery, he made an interesting choice that surprised few who knew Allen personally. A stocky man with a gruff voice, an air of quiet competence, and the bedside manner of a country doctor, Thad Allen had excelled throughout a 30-plus-year career.

He was one of the youngest officers ever to make admiral in the Coast Guard. As the son of an enlisted chief petty officer to whom the Coast Guard had thrown a lifeline during the Great Depression, Allen had grown up with a deep love of the service and an innate respect for the

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Vice Adm. Thad Allen, in charge of Katrina recovery efforts, views damage left by the hurricane. Allen was touring Hancock County, Miss., Sept. 21.



MARK WOLFE, FEMA

values of duty and sacrifice, and he could effortlessly mask a keen intellect with a seaman's salty humor.

Because it combines the "can-do" culture of the other uniformed services with a penchant for operating hand-in-glove with local and state officials, as well as with multiple federal agencies, the Coast Guard ethos was well suited to the exigencies of a monster hurricane. Indeed, Allen would often think back to his long experience in managing oil spills as a frame of reference for the countless challenges left in Katrina's wake.

Like Katrina, a bad oil spill could destroy local

economies, overwhelm state capabilities, and represent a drain on strategic resources. Oil spills also inevitably threw a lot of very mad people from every level of government into proximity with one another. Yes, in many ways Katrina was like a bad oil spill, albeit one roughly the size of Great Britain.

When asked about his plan for addressing the short- and long-term objectives in the Katrina recovery effort, Allen said that in his experience, strategic plans were shelved about the time a date was stamped on them. He was more interested in communicating a clear strategic intent so that everyone involved in what was already a massive effort could swim in generally the same direction, like a large school of fish that instinctively turned at the same moment.

The first guiding principle would be to treat all of Katrina's many victims like family. In terms of strategic intent, Allen drew a simple pyramid. At the bottom, he scribbled in the Superdome, a symbol of the botched rescue effort. At the top, he wrote "New Orleans 2.0," representing the ultimate vision of a future Big Easy resurrected from the foul waters. As you moved up the pyramid, Allen explained, the focus shifted from disaster response to recovery, and the objectives changed based loosely on psychologist Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs."

"If you are drowning, the first thing you want is dry land," Allen said. "If you are on dry land, the next thing you want is something to eat and drink. Having eaten, you want a place to sleep, and then you want a better place to sleep. Then you want aid to start rebuilding and getting your life back in order."

Such a construct suggests near-term goals of draining New Orleans, recovering bodies, assessing environmental safety issues, and launching a massive debris-removal project. Then come the difficult issues of finding temporary housing for many of the roughly 1 million citizens displaced by the storm and undertaking a massive effort to match federal relief aid to individual victims.

The long-term goal of a new New Orleans that would be even better than the original raises the thorniest issue of all: how to protect the below-sea-level city from the surrounding waters of the Mississippi River, Lake Pontchartrain and the Gulf of Mexico.

"The fact is, you can create a vision of New Orleans and build the levee system to it, or you can build the city around what you think is an affordable levee system," Allen said. "Quite frankly, working the optimum trade-off between those two approaches will be a big challenge. The vision will have to come from local and

state officials, with the federal government trying to create the conditions to realize it. At some point, however, we will need that strategic vision so that a lot of effort isn't wasted rebuilding and then tearing down."

Conceptually organizing the federal response to Hurricane Katrina based on a hierarchy of needs makes logical sense, but reaching Maslow's "self-actualization" in the form of a rebuilt New Orleans seems a long way off, given America's unique political psychology.

Nowhere is the issue of federal prerogatives versus

political interests.

Witnessed firsthand, however, the recovery efforts looked less like a school of like-minded fish, and more like a feeding frenzy.

An American exodus

"Well, Admiral, you've got your hands full," said Alabama Gov. Bob Riley.

"Yes, sir, and I'm here to listen to your concerns and tell you a little about what we're doing," Allen responded, having arranged a courtesy call at a Coast Guard training base in Mobile, Ala.

victims. With evacuees living in virtually every hotel and motel room in Alabama, Riley raised questions that were on the minds of all governors with refugees in their states: What about federal assistance for schools, infrastructure, Medicaid, and health care for the new residents, many of them destitute?

"We have no idea how many are even in our own state," Riley said. "So mostly what we need from you is direction."

On the flight to his headquarters in Baton Rouge, Allen mused that every day he moved further away from the familiar realm of a Coast Guard admiral into

uncharted territory. "Now I sense that I'm about to become a housing czar," he added wryly.

The effort to move evacuees off gymnasium floors and into temporary housing underscored the immense challenges of perhaps the largest displacement of Americans since the Dust Bowl during the Great Depression. Based on data from past hurricanes, FEMA officials estimated they would need 200,000 trailers and mobile homes to house evacuees just from New Orleans. The pace of the operation was also extremely critical, with past experience suggesting that the longer it took to find housing, the more likely that evacuees would simply decide to relocate to another state. Yet, no one knew whether FEMA was capable of assembling what amounted to a mid-sized city's worth of temporary housing in just a matter of months. No one had ever tried it before.

And then there's the matter of political philosophy. The White House much preferred the idea of giving evacuees vouchers to rent rather than constructing temporary towns totally dependent on federal aid. Louisiana Gov. Blanco understandably considered rent vouchers an invitation to export her voters.

That was just one of many examples of how federal, state and local political interests came into conflict in such a mammoth operation.

To sort through the competing interests and to balance an uncertain supply and demand in terms of housing and evacuees, Allen proposed establishing a regional housing council. Because states are connected to federal emergency assistance through local FEMA offices that

report directly to headquarters in Washington in stovepipe fashion, each of the states had little idea of what the others were doing to cope with the Katrina exodus. But even the modest proposal to create a regional housing council to coordinate those efforts met with

MEETING EVERYONE'S NEEDS

Vice Adm. Thad Allen, FEMA principal federal official for Gulf Coast operations, visits with a Chitimacha Tribe evacuee and his daughter in St. Mary Parish Oct. 18. Allen went to Charenton to meet with tribal leaders to assure them that FEMA will be responsive to their members' needs.



states' rights more sensitive than in the South, particularly in a Louisiana and a New Orleans led by Democrats dealing with a Republican administration. To succeed in the Katrina recovery effort, Allen knew he would have to forge some semblance of unity out of those competing

"Well, we're not nearly as bad hit as Louisiana and Mississippi, but we do need to know what you want us to do about evacuees," said Riley, whose state had already placed 1,300 trailers in its parks and reopened an old Army base in anticipation of a further wave of Katrina



skepticism.

"I called Jeb Bush and talked to him about the idea of a housing council, and I can tell you he wasn't overly enthusiastic," said Allen, who as the Coast Guard's former regional commander in Miami knew the Florida governor well.

"It reminded me once again that we cannot come in here and seem to impose federal solutions on the states."

Putting out fires

FEMA's Joint Field Office and Allen's new headquarters in Baton Rouge are housed in a massive warehouse that was rapidly filling up with hundreds of federal officials, all of them jockeying for desk and computer space and trying to re-establish communications links crippled by the storm. Baton Rouge itself was bursting at the seams with evacuees from New Orleans, as well as federals pouring in from Washington.

Hardly a hotel room or rental car could be found in the entire city, and flights coming and going were overbooked.

As the first order of business, Allen was determined to put out the fire over body retrieval in New Orleans that was kindled by the governor's criticism. At a hastily

arranged press briefing, he explained how each of his four-man retrieval teams already at work included a chaplain who treated the deceased with utmost dignity during the transfer to a temporary morgue in St. Gabriel.

A possible motive for the governor's criticisms was revealed in the succeeding days when the military was ordered to hand mortuary operations over to a local contractor who had been hired by the state to the tune of \$100,000 a day. Everyone, however, understood the general need to hire local contractors for reconstruction work in a state that had also lost an estimated 35 percent of its revenue stream with the shutdown of New Orleans.

As insurance against further criticisms, Allen introduced at the press conference Dr. Louis Cataldie, the director of emergency medical services for New Orleans. The two men had worked closely together in the week following Katrina's landfall.

"Admiral Allen is a man of his word who's done everything he promised.

Believe me, if I

had a problem with the level of federal support I'm receiving, I'd tell you. I'm not bashful," Cataldie told the local press. "Am I frustrated? Sure, and I'll remain frustrated until we pick the last body up out of that water. Even then, it will take months, maybe years, to identify all the bodies."

MAPPING IT OUT

Vice Adm. Thad Allen, left, and Mayor Ray Nagin show a map of the locations and resources set up for victims of Hurricane Katrina Sept. 21.



JOCELYN AUGUSTINO, FEMA

A compact man with a neatly trimmed white beard, Cataldie had the shell-shocked look so common to those who had weathered the storm and its aftermath. Cataldie had endured the aftermath in the Superdome, where he was forced to conduct triage and limit care to those patients he judged the most likely to survive the ordeal. Ten of his fellow citizens had died in the arena.

After the press conference, I asked Cataldie whether he was worried about drawing the ire of Gov. Blanco with his vocal support for Allen and the federal effort.

"You know, I'm not a politically correct person. We don't have time to play politics or be politically correct, because we have to get all our people out of that water," Cataldie said. "But I think you can tell a lot about a man by looking him in the eye and shaking his hand, and I believe Admiral Allen. I also happen to think it's important that people have faith in their government."

If the levee breaks

From the air at night, New Orleans was a watery ghost town. Far below, search lights glimmered in the dark swamp of St. Bernard Parish and East Orleans like distant fireflies. Adm. Allen's Coast Guard helicopter banked hard over the Mississippi River and came to a hover over the USS Iwo Jima, an amphibious command ship berthed dockside. Nearby, the festive holiday lights of the giant Carnival cruise ship Ecstasy struck a discordant note of cheer. The effect was altogether surreal, the Canal Street area transformed into the set of a Hollywood end-of-days extravaganza: Escape From New Orleans.

As an early introduction into the spicy gumbo of Louisiana-style politics, Allen was scheduled to attend a press briefing in which New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin planned to announce the reopening of the city in just a matter of days, having hardly consulted with federal authorities and far in advance of what most federal safety experts felt was prudent.

Before attending the press conference, Allen convened a command briefing in a dockside headquarters trailer

dubbed "Red October." The issue at the top of the agenda was the advisability of the mayor's plan.

"Sir, the input I'm getting is that we would first need a viable evacuation plan not only for anyone let back in the city, but also for federal and state workers," said Coast Guard Capt. Tom Atkins, Allen's chief of staff. That's "because a bad thunderstorm — let alone another hurricane—might reflood the city again."

Stephen Browning, the director of programs for the Army Corps of Engineers, was even more direct. New Orleans, he noted, had enjoyed nearly two weeks of sunshine after Katrina's passing, and that had greatly

helped to evaporate standing waters and reduce the workload on over-stressed pumps. Even before a complete assessment of the city's levee system could be completed, however, the Corps concluded that it had been

CALLING IT HOME

Vice Adm. Thad Allen, principal federal official for FEMA's Gulf Coast recovery efforts, talks with two New Orleans evacuees at the new 573-unit trailer park fifteen miles north of Baton Rouge Oct. 8.



GREG HENSHALL, FEMA

severely weakened by the hurricane.

"We can handle three inches of rain or less, but I want to stress that we are still in hurricane season, and the city's first-line defensive barrier against hurricanes was destroyed by Katrina," said Browning, who reiterated his fears in a brief interview afterward. "The mayor needs to fully understand these risks before he reopens the city."

At a press conference held in downtown New Orleans only blocks from the Superdome, Allen stood beside



Nagin as the mayor declared a brand-new day for the city. The “sun was shining” and it was a “good day for New Orleans,” Nagin said. “The city is back in business again in terms of the port and airport, and we’re bringing back 200,000 citizens to get it going again ... The city of New Orleans, beginning this weekend, can start to breathe again.”

Everyone understood that Nagin was under intense pressure from his supporters in the business community to send a positive signal that the city was reopening, but the press conference had most federal authorities shaking their heads in bewilderment. Virtually no official on the ground recognized the “sunshine city” the mayor described. In a last-ditch effort to dissuade Nagin from the reopening plan, Thad Allen and a group of senior officials held a private meeting with him.

According to a source knowl-

edgeable about the meeting, the mayor could not be dissuaded. The outcome pointed once again to the competing political stakes involved for officials at the local, state and federal levels.

Because the decision was ultimately up to the mayor, Allen had top officials from the Health and Human Services Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Corps of Engineers put their worries in writing, and on Sunday, Sept. 18, he appeared on all the morning news shows to voice them publicly. On Monday, with a new hurricane, Rita, strengthening and heading for the Gulf of Mexico, Nagin reversed himself and said that New Orleans residents could not return home after all.

Hope returns

When Marine One landed on the Iwo Jima on the late afternoon of Sept. 15, many of the tens of thousands of soldiers, relief workers, government officials and journalists who were the new denizens of New Orleans waited expectantly for President Bush’s address to the nation

from the city’s historic Jackson Square. Barred from attending the address or asking questions, journalists gathered to watch it on television at the bar of the Sheraton Hotel on Canal Street, a sort of unofficial press club. Given the carefully scripted nature of the event and the destruction that reporters had witnessed in New Orleans, it was easy to be cynical about the speech. At the Sheraton bar, a photographer from a European press agency was describing a photo he took recently, only a few miles from Jackson Square, of an elderly woman’s body that starving dogs had reached ahead of the search-and retrieval teams.

In the address, Bush declared that the government would do whatever was needed, for as long as was required, to make the city stronger and to rebuild it better than before. “There is no way to imagine America without New Orleans,” he said, and there were nods

around the room. Bush conceded that the effort would likely require one of the largest public works projects the world had ever seen. But when the work was completed, he assured Americans, they would have “something to be proud of.”

Afterward, an ABC News reporter interviewed a group of New Orleans evacuees living in Houston’s Astrodome. Try as he might, the ABC reporter could not get one to express doubt about Bush’s promise to resurrect New Orleans. Those with the greatest claim to cynicism had opted for hope instead.

“You have to remember that after Katrina, the people of New Orleans didn’t know if they still had jobs or homes. They didn’t know if the city itself even had a future,” Terry Ebbert, New Orleans’ homeland-security chief, said in an interview. A former Marine colonel, Ebbert holds the Navy Cross for valor in combat. “I’ve led units all my life, and I can tell you from experience that there is only so much you can ask people to endure, if they don’t have a goal or something to look forward to,” he said. “So it was really important for the citizens of this

city to hear that their nation was committed to New Orleans.”

The day after the president’s address, Allen returned to his headquarters in Baton Rouge to focus on strategic issues.

There comes a period of synchronicity in every successful operation when a commander and his staff fall into deep problem-solving mode, when they knock down obstacles almost as fast as they appear, and you could

sense that Allen and his growing pack of “dogs that could hunt” had found that battle rhythm.

Already, the Baton Rouge staff was developing a 100-day master plan for the handoff of the Katrina response effort to a Joint Federal and State Recovery Office, a semi-permanent mid-wife that would likely spend

years and as much as \$200 billion nurturing the Gulf Coast’s rebirth.

Barring another hurricane or unforeseen disaster, New Orleans and the surrounding area should get a little better with each new day.

In the meantime, Thad Allen will continue to spend 18-hour days listening to the concerns of

the president and of the people left homeless and penniless by Katrina.

When a reporter marveled that he found time for each group, Allen recalled getting in trouble as a young boy: He had climbed up some water pipes from the base of River Point Island in San Francisco Bay, where his father was working in a Coast Guard carpenter’s shop. At the top of the bluff, he remembers, he saw a beautiful mansion where an admiral lived. Forty years later, Vice Adm. Thad Allen had walked through the front door of the mansion as an honored guest, and he looked down the hill and saw the same water pipes he had scaled so long ago.

“You know, that kind of history really grounds you,” said Allen. “I think that’s why I don’t tend to get overwhelmed by people, or overwhelmed by situations.

On some level, I figure we’re all the same. You just have to remember where you came from.”

editor’s note: Article reprinted by permission of the National Journal.

THANK YOU

Vice Adm. Thad Allen is thanked by Mayor Ray Nagin as Governor Kathleen Blanco, left, and Lt. Gen. Russel Honore join them at a press conference on the evacuation plans set for Hurricane Rita Sept. 21.



JOCELYN AUGUSTINO, FEMA



ANDREA BOEHLE, FEMA

OFF TO MOTHER’S

Vice Adm. Thad Allen visits Oct. 15, with staff from Mother’s restaurant on their first day to open since Hurricane Katrina. Mother’s Restaurant is a long standing local tradition in New Orleans.



Flying High

"We were
tasked with
anything and
everything..."

— Kent Greene,
Auxiliary Air Squadron
commander

Story and photos by
PA 2 Jennifer Johnson,
14th Dist.



DONATED AIR

Jim Finley, an Auxiliary pilot with Air Station New Orleans, used his Cessna 210 to assist with the Hurricane Katrina response. Finley and the rest of the Auxiliary Air New Orleans crew flew numerous missions throughout the Katrina response, conducting missions such as passenger transport and damage assessment flights.

The Cessna 210 only seats four people. It's a tight squeeze, and there's hardly room for personal belongings or extra baggage. Although the plane may be a little small, its purpose after Hurricane Katrina proved very big.

While Coast Guard active duty and reserve members rescued thousands following the storm, the lesser known group of small aircraft owners was responding as well.

Working behind the scenes and without pay,

members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary Air program flew countless hours, supplementing the Coast Guard operations after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"We were tasked with anything and everything in regard to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," said Kent Greene, Air Station New Orleans Auxiliary Air Squadron commander. "That included but was not limited to disaster area overflights, passenger transport and other agency requests."

Used as a force multiplier for the Coast Guard, Auxiliary Air members from Louisiana, Texas, Alabama and Florida assisted during the response to the hurricanes.

"Auxiliary Air was absolutely essential to the success of Hurricane Katrina and Rita response," said Lt. j.g. Aaron Greene, Air Station New Orleans Auxiliary Air coordinator. "Without being asked, Aux Air stepped up to any challenge they were presented with and did an incredible job supporting the Coast Guard mission."

Unaware of the considerable damage to his business in New Orleans, Auxiliary Air pilot Jim Finley was ready to help out as soon as weather conditions per-

mitted.

A hurricane plan is in place for communications between all of the Auxiliary Air pilots and the Air Station. "We knew that Aux Air was going to be needed so we tried to stay in contact with the air station by any means we could," said Finley.

A member of Auxiliary Air since 1997, Finley flew missions for seven straight days following the hurricane. "Even with the number of hours we were tasked, I never got tired of helping the Coast Guard and the ones in need," said Finley.

Finley and his Cessna 210, one of four Aux Air units attached to Air Station New Orleans, spent the majority of the days ferrying Coast Guard personnel and other agency officials over damaged areas throughout Louisiana. These trips were vital to keep key leaders apprised of current operations and ongoing progress.

"I'm just glad the Coast Guard counts the Auxiliary as a valuable player in times of crisis," said Greene. "We stand by ready to assist with whatever tasking the Coast Guard has for us and we do it because we want to."

Auxiliary Wings

The Coast Guard has long been involved with aviation. Beginning in 1915, the Coast Guard used a Curtiss flying boat as the test of whether aviation was practical for search and rescue. Today, air is one of the major components of the search and rescue missions of the Coast Guard.

Auxiliary members who are private pilots volunteer their services and planes just as other members volunteer their boats and boating skills.

Air Operations involves many aviation-related missions. Here is a list of the missions that Auxiliary pilots might normally fly:

- SAR Mission - Search and rescue call out or the air equivalent to a vessel safety patrol. During a SAR mission, aircraft fly predetermined search patterns based on a computer program. These search patterns are based on last known or assumed position, wind, current, and type of vessel that is missing.
- Enforcement of Laws and Treaties - Air support of a Coast Guard mission to monitor major fishing areas.
- MEP Mission - Air support in the area of Marine Environmental Protection. Missions include support of locating and estimating sizes of oil slicks and other environmental accidents.
- Logistics Mission - The transportation of personnel and equipment. Auxiliarists transport individuals for all types of Coast Guard support and humanitarian support.
- Training Mission - Training missions involving air operations and coordination with land and surface vessels to hone skills needed to support the aims and missions of the Coast Guard.
- VIP transportation and Area Familiarization for Coast Guard personnel.

There is a new concentration on Maritime Domain Awareness. The objective is to spot and report unusual activities, commercial vessel movements and environmental problems. Missions are conducted with one or two pilots and an observer.

During an emergency call-out, Auxiliary pilots and crews are available to lift off from their airfields on short notice on weekdays. On weekends during boating season they are normally either in the air or at the airfield ready to fly. These men and women, like their boating counterparts, volunteer their time and energy, and aircraft, to assist the missions of the Coast Guard.



REACHING OUT

Story and photos by
PA2 Lisa Hennings &
Lt. Cmdr. Benjamin Benson,
1st Dist.

HELPING HAND

MST1 Matthew Valenti, Sector Seattle, meets with a Southern Waste Services Environmental First Response contractor to discuss plans to defuel a displaced Vietnamese fishing vessel in Bayou Portage, Miss. Valenti, assigned to a position with a vessel team, searched for displaced fishing vessels, oversaw contracted defueling jobs and enforced compliance of salvage plans.

"These days of sorrow and
outrage have also been
marked by acts of courage
and kindness that make all
Americans proud. Coast
Guard and other personnel
rescued tens of thousands
of people from flooded
neighborhoods."

— President George W. Bush

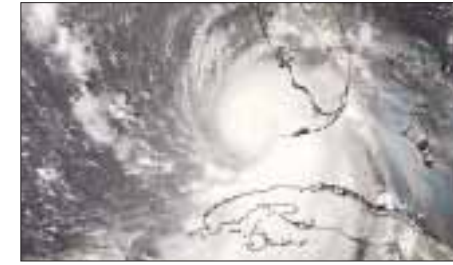
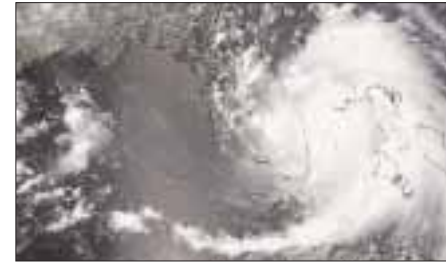
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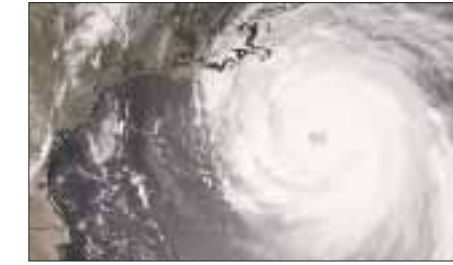
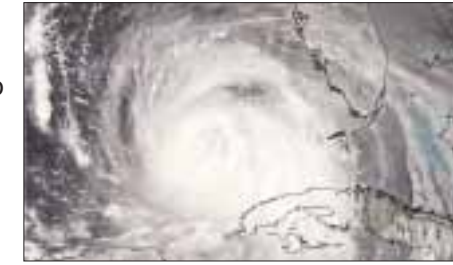
DISASTER Response



August 24 — After drifting across the Atlantic for more than a week, remnants of Tropical Depression Ten flares up in the Bahamas. South Florida braces for a possible Category 1 hurricane as Tropical Storm Katrina looms about 135 miles east of the Florida coast.



August 26 — Tagged as an 80 mile-per-hour, Category 1 hurricane, Katrina nevertheless leaves six people dead after coming ashore in Florida. Racing into the Gulf of Mexico, Katrina reaches Category 2 status and is continuing to strengthen with 105 mile-per-hour winds at 11 p.m. local time.



August 29 — Announcing itself with shrieking 145-mph winds, Katrina slams into the Gulf Coast just outside of New Orleans, submerging entire neighborhoods up to their roofs, swamping Mississippi's beachfront. Rescuers descend from above to assist the countless numbers of stranded residents of Louisiana and Mississippi.



August 29 — First rescue occurs within a few hours after the storm makes landfall. An HH-65 helicopter working out of Naval Air Station Bell Chase rescues two adults and one infant.



September 4 — Over 11,613 lives saved to date and 9,400 hospital evacuations conducted. HH-60 forced into an emergency landing at Lake Front Airport due to mechanical difficulties. Four MSST crewmembers airlifted to airport to provide security until a mechanic can be flown out to assess problem.

September 1 — 2,859 cumulative lives saved. Damage assessment shows that critical aids to navigation have been destroyed; with range and buoy systems destroyed or off station.

September 7 — 12,242 cumulative lives saved by air resources; 11,325 cumulative lives saved by surface resources; 9,400 Cumulated hospital evacuations with a total of 32,967 persons assisted.

September 11 — 12,533 cumulative lives saved by air resources; 11,584 cumulative lives saved by surface resources; 9,403 cumulative hospital evacuations with a total of 33,520 persons assisted. Additional environmental spills identified due to receding flood waters and more frequent overflights with 15 separate major spills being monitored. Coast Guard has responded to 285 Pollution cases, 62 of which are open cases.



September 19 — 12,535 cumulative lives saved by air resources; 11,600 cumulative lives saved by surface resources; 9,409 cumulated hospital evacuations with a total of 33,544 persons assisted.



September 23 — Steady rain at the edge of Hurricane Rita sends water pouring through three breaches in a patched levee into the 9th Ward in New Orleans.

September 24 — Hurricane Rita makes landfall just east of Sabine Pass, on the Texas-Louisiana line, as a Category 3 hurricane with top sustained winds of 120 mph. Some of the worst flooding occurs along the coast of Louisiana. Floodwaters are 9 feet deep near the town of Abbeville, La. Three feet of flood water reported in the 9th Ward of New Orleans.

September 25 — Rita cumulative lives saved: 124 (4 pre-land-fall; 120 post-landfall); medical evacuations: 44 (42 pre-landfall; 2 post-landfall); with a total of 167 saves and evacuations.



September 30 — Cumulative Katrina/Rita response; 33,735 lives saved or evacuated to date. Cumulative Katrina/Rita lives saved: 24,273 (24,135 Katrina, 138 Rita). Cumulative Katrina/Rita medical evacuations: 9,462 (9,409 Katrina, 53 Rita).



September 19 — Rita is a tropical storm, but is expected to become a hurricane later tonight. Rita is expected to reach Category 2 strength by Sept. 21 when it is near the Florida Keys, and could become a Category 3 hurricane when it reaches the Gulf of Mexico.



September 21 — The storm strikes Florida, then makes a rush past northern Cuba. During this time National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration reports Rita's record-setting Category 5 strength as a result of achieving a minimum central pressure of 897 millibars. This record strength steadily diminishes prior to landfall after Rita moves over cooler waters in the northern Gulf of Mexico.



September 25 — After peaking in strength at 175 mph steady winds, Rita makes landfall between Sabine Pass, Texas, and Johnson's Bayou, Louisiana, at 02:38 local time as a Category 3 hurricane, with windspeeds of 120 mph and a storm surge of 10 feet.



THE COAST GUARD LEND A HAND TO THE GULF COAST'S VIETNAMESE FISHING COMMUNITY.

Imagine that you are a refugee in a foreign country. You've barely escaped a dangerous war zone. Now you live the precarious life of a fisherman.

Some 30,000 Vietnamese-Americans call the Gulf Coast home. Many were refugees from the Vietnam conflict, lured to settle here by the fishing industry, its familiar climate and hope for peace. Hurricane Katrina wrecked hundreds of fishing vessels — an unsettling upheaval and collective loss for many. The language barrier left many in this community unwarned and ill-prepared when the hurricane struck. Many sought refuge on their boats rather than in shelters.

The Coast Guard went right to work with rescues and environmental clean up. A team from Ohio's Port Security Unit 309 tackled grounded vessels in the Industrial Canal located in Gulfport, Miss. They soon ran smack into a language barrier. Distraught Vietnamese fishermen and their families needed information and help.

PSU 309 encountered one couple aboard their vessel in the Industrial Canal who had lost everything and refused to leave, even though the vessel was unsafe.

The Mobile Unified Command handling the cleanup in Alabama and Mississippi called on MST3 Huynh Nguyen, a reservist from Sector Mobile who speaks Vietnamese. Nguyen, a Vietnamese fisherman whose parents had escaped the Vietnam conflict, could translate for the Coast Guard, and as a member of both communities, bridging the cultural gap. When not serving in blue, Nguyen works on his father's shrimp boat.

While overseeing hazardous material remediation and vessel recovery, Nguyen met several Vietnamese vessel owners in Bayou La Batre, Ala. The owners described their safety, comfort and career concerns. Nguyen maintained a log, translated it for the unified command and helped bridge gap.

"Being Vietnamese, a fisherman and in the Coast Guard, I knew I was a good resource and what I had to do here. This hits home for me. I did my best to voice the concerns of the Vietnamese fishing community to vessel team leaders. Since I encountered the Vietnamese in the field, there has been a better understanding of what they [the Coast Guard] are trying to do and what they need," said Nguyen.



The unified command also brought in a team of public affairs specialists to reach out to the affected mariners. They drafted an informational memorandum for boat owners and had it translated into Vietnamese. Working closely with Sector Mobile's Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Coordinator, Scott Labak, the team reached out to the fishing community via a network of informal leaders.

Father Dominic, of the Vietnamese Martyrs Church, is one of the leaders to whom the team reached out. His community in Biloxi, Miss., was severely hit. The level of flooding, more than seven feet, was clearly visible in the church building.

As church members handed out rice to the hurricane's victims, Lt. Cmdr. Ben Benson, a public affairs officer temporarily assigned from the 1st District, met with Father Dominic to explain the stranded vessel remediation operations. With Father Dominic translating on the spot, Benson spoke at a morning service and explained the Coast Guard's actions to the 300 attendees. Afterward, he and Labak met individually



with concerned fishermen.

The vessel operations continue case by case. There is good news. Some vessels can be saved and are being refloated. With Nguyen's help, the Vietnamese couple who lost everything but their vessel in the Industrial Canal could communicate their concerns and needs. They are now being helped with food from the Red Cross, and a salvage company refloated their boat at no charge. 🇺🇸

ON SCENE HELP

Left: MST3 Huynh Nguyen, a reservist stationed at Sector Mobile, talks with Nhanh Nguyen, the owner of the fishing vessel Sharon II in Bayou La Batre, Ala. Nguyen, a Vietnamese interpreter, met with many Vietnamese vessel owners and relayed information from the Coast Guard.

Right: Lt. Cmdr. Ben Benson, First District public affairs officer, and Sector Mobile Fishing Vessel Safety Coordinators Scott Labak and Gregory Klix, inspect a displaced vessel in Ocean Springs, Miss.



GROUNDING

Left: Lt. Cmdr. Richard Frattarelli, TRACEN Cape May, drives by some of the many Hurricane Katrina destroyed vessels in Bayou Portage, Miss.

Devoted Care

Chaplains help rescuers with their spiritual health

Story by PA1 Kyle Niemi, 8th Dist.

Besides shipmates and commands, rescuers and responders found another resource they could count on for maintaining their mental and spiritual well-being — chaplains.

Following Hurricane Katrina, a Chaplain Emergency Response Team was established to engage crews working around-the-clock rescuing citizens or repairing rescue stations.

“We provide pastoral crisis intervention in a disaster scenario,” said Capt. Douglas Waite, chaplain for the Pacific Area, headquartered in Alameda, Calif. Waite, from Yakima, Wash., is one of several chaplains who deployed to areas of the Gulf Coast to help crews cope, “by getting them in touch with their spirituality,” he said.

Waite said that he and the other CERT chaplains are assisting Lt. Cmdr. Scott Morton, the chaplain assigned to the 8th District. Just like the rest of the district staff, Morton was displaced, working from the Sector New Orleans Incident Command Post in Alexandria, La.

Morton directed nearly 30 chaplains in their assignments at Coast Guard units along the Gulf Coast with Waite, one of the CERT leaders. Morton, of Birmingham, Ala., has, “really steered this thing from the beginning,” said Lt. Cmdr. Endel Lee, another chaplain from New Orleans serving with the Coast Guard CERT. “He’s devoted to the care of these people,” Lee continued.

Like many Coast Guard responders, Lee, originally of Tanner Williams, Ala., has been impacted personally by the storms. His home on the campus of the Baptist Seminary in Gentilly, La., suffered significant damage. A reserve Marine chaplain, Lee took part in

the evacuation of the seminary where he serves as a professor.

In fact, Lee had just returned home to his family after a year with the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, he took his family out of the city to ensure their safety. “Then, I went back into the city in support of the Coast Guard,” he said.

Lee spent nearly a week with rescue and response crews at Coast Guard Sector New Orleans on the coast of Louisiana’s Lake Pontchartrain. He administered religious services there every night.

“I was there to listen to them and offer them words of encouragement or hope,” he said.

Waite said he was proud of the entire team of chaplains, including Morton and Lee. They were both working while displaced from their families. They put their personal issues aside to assist others.

Lee echoed a statement that could hold true for any Coast Guard rescuers involved in the hurricane response: “My responsibility is to take care of others.”

“My responsibility is to take care of others.”

— Lt. Cmdr. Endel Lee,
a Marine Corps Reserve
chaplain serving with CERT

Lending An Ear

CISM teams travel the Gulf Coast helping peers cope with Katrina effects

Story by PA2 Jennifer Johnson
14th Dist.

Does visiting 22 Coast Guard units in 14 days, in post-hurricane conditions, sound like ideal temporary duty? For six members of the Honolulu Maritime Safety and Security Team 91107, the frantic pace from home was not only rewarding but the least they could do to show fellow Coast Guardsmen their support.

Unaware of what was in store for them once they arrived in Mobile, Ala., the six Critical Incident Stress Management providers soon became a mobile unit. The MSSTs and three other CISM providers from Pacific Area units jumped into their Winnebagos and set out on a 14-day pilgrimage making sure those members in the grief-stricken areas were not forgotten.

“It became our mission to visit all of these little places and let them

“Some people were hanging on by a thread and we were there to listen and let them vent.”

— OSC Phil Jordanelli,
MSST 91107, 14th Dist.



REFLECTIVE MOOD

An unidentified Coast Guardsman takes a moment to ponder his next task. The Critical Incident Stress Management program was developed to help Coast Guard members effectively deal with the stress associated with the harsh environments and human tragedy they encounter on their duties. In the first three weeks of rescue operations following Hurricane Katrina, CISM peers had assisted nearly 2,000 Coast Guard members.

know people out there were still thinking about them,” said OSC Phil Jordanelli, MSST 91107. “We wanted to make sure that remote units like Station Dauphin at Dauphin Island, Ala.; Grand Isle, La.; and Pascagoula, Miss., were not forgotten.”

Because members often perform their duties in harsh environments and in the face of great human tragedy and suffering, the Coast Guard developed a peer program to help them cope with

the stress associated with critical incidents.

“The Critical Incident Stress Management program is specifically designed to mitigate and, if possible, prevent the development of dysfunctional, and potentially disabling, posttraumatic syndromes and stress disorders,” said Jeri Couthen, an Employee Assistance Program manager at the Integrated Support Command in Honolulu. “We try to give our people the tools that will allow them to process the event and help them to be able to remain operationally functional.”

During the 1,500 mile trip around the Gulf Coast region, the team heard amazing stories of heroism and loss. In one area, a



unit's station may have been unscathed or escaped with little to no damage, but the members' homes were in complete shambles. In another area nearby it was just the opposite.

"What you saw on TV was nothing compared to what we were seeing in the field," said Jordanelli. "Some people were hanging on by a thread and we were there to listen and let them vent."

CISM providers are not allowed to take any notes during one-on-

Crisis Management Brief and Demobilization training for roughly 300 people; delivered 1,000 pounds of food, clothing and children's toys and helped coordinate a prayer service with several chaplains on board the CGC Decisive.

Nearly 100 CISM providers responded to Coast Guard members, families and civilians following both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

AMTC Mike Thomas, a trained CISM provider and rescue swimmer

himself, arrived from Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C., to help rescuers deal with the fact that some people could not be saved.

"It's an emotional roller coaster," he said.

"It's an emotional roller coaster. It's the greatest feeling in the world when you can save a life and it's the worst when you can't."

— AMTC Michael Thomas,
Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C.

one discussions and are not mental health professionals, but they are trained to recognize stress indicators and educate people on what outlets are available to them.

"One of our main missions is to educate people to take care of themselves first," said BM2 Tiffany Peltier, MSST 91107. "A lot of people were still in shock when we got there and we tried to help them balance the operational needs with what they lost."

During the 14-day trek the team conducted approximately 100 one-on-one discussions; presented

"It's the greatest feeling in the world when you can save a life and it's the worst when you can't."

"The biggest thing is letting them know that what they're experiencing is a normal reaction to an abnormal experience," he added.

The shock or complete scope of what has happened may not have set in yet. As the days go by, and as everyone settles into a new routine – that's when a person may need to talk. A peer counselor, chaplain or the Employee Assistance Program is available, ready for a call. ☎

NOT A PRETTY SITE

A Coast Guard damage assessment flight over New Orleans on Aug. 29 bears witness to the destruction Hurricane Katrina inflicted on the city known as the "Big Easy." Response operations would be anything but easy, as Coast Guard rescue crews battled never-before-witnessed sights, sounds and smells. Close to a hundred Critical Incident Stress Management providers were instrumental in keeping rescuers mentally sharp.



SHIPMATE

STORY BY PA3 DAN BENDER, PADET NEW YORK

As Hurricane Katrina churned up the Gulf of Mexico with its sights set on the Deep South, a Coast Guard petty officer sat alone in a barracks room in New York while his entire family faced the wrath of the storm without him.

EM2 Larry Knight, from Sector New York, was glued to his TV with the rest of the nation, watching his fellow Coast Guardsmen rescue thousands of lives. He had no idea how soon they would be rescuing him.

Most of his family in Jackson, Miss., had been preparing for the record-breaking storm to make landfall. His wife and two-year-old daughter had just moved to Larry's parents' house in New Orleans in anticipation of relocating back there. Larry was just a month away from transfer-

ring from active duty to the Coast Guard Reserve.

In anticipation of the storm Larry purchased a plane ticket to Jackson and took emergency leave to be with his family, but the airline cancelled his flight and it would be days before they would be reunited.

Larry's wife, Alicia, lost contact with him when phone service went out as Katrina drew closer to shore. "One a.m. on the day of the storm was the last conversation we had for two days," she said.

Separation anxiety set in.

"I was terrified. I couldn't sleep or eat. I was a nervous wreck," said Knight.

"For three days I was in front of the TV, on the phone and on the computer trying to figure something out."

Isolated in their Jackson home, Knight's family had no way of leaving or contacting him. "Because everything

was flooded and the power went out, they had no idea how bad things really were everywhere else," he said.

Meanwhile, back at the Aids to Navigation, Team New York in Bayonne, N.J., Knight's shipmates began collecting money to help him prepare for his family's return.

"They had done a lot to take some donations and get some stuff together for him," said BMCS Joseph Wright, officer-in-charge of ANT New York.

As his shipmates began collecting money, Larry was relieved to finally learn that his family had survived

the storm.

"After I pulled myself together, I started getting ready," Knight said. "I started shopping for things I knew we would need."

Although he was making preparations, he wasn't sure for what. He still did not know the condition of his parent's home or whether he even would be able to move to New Orleans. So he made arrangements with CWO Peggy Kennedy, the Sector New York housing officer, for an apartment at Coast Guard housing for himself, his wife and his daughter.

Finally, five days after Katrina hit, Larry was able to book a ticket for a flight to Jackson. "Even though I already knew they were okay, it was such a relief to finally see them," he said.

It would be another week before Knight and his family would be able to leave Jackson, but in the meantime, they finally were able to take a trip to New Orleans to survey the damage at his parents' house.

"The house was completely destroyed," said Alicia. "All I found was a couple of rings and a few pictures.

A trophy was the only real sentimental thing Larry found."

"We measured the water line and it was 8 feet, 6 inches high," he said.

It was obvious now that they wouldn't be returning to New Orleans for a while.

Back at ANT New York, his shipmates were keeping tabs on his situation. When they learned what happened to his parents, they turned to Sector New York for help for the family.

"The first time I talked to him was four days after he left," said Wright. "He told me that everything was gone. So I sent an e-mail to the chief's mess at the sector and it got so big, so fast."

When Kennedy learned Katrina displaced his parents as well, she made arrangements for a second temporary apartment in housing for his parents, sister and her daughter. "It was the right thing to do because they lost everything," said Kennedy.

"Money and clothes and furniture came pouring in," said Wright. "We had a lady who wanted to go out and

buy them a new washer and dryer."

Several of the chiefs involved in this effort were prospective chief petty officers going through the chief's call to initiation, said OSCS Kevin Leggett, chief of the mess at Sector New York. "A few of these PCPOs took the initiative to assist Knight and his family in their hour of need by collecting and moving furniture, appliances and clothing," he said.

While arrangements were being made back in New York, the Knights were having a rough time getting out of Jackson.

"The hardest part was getting gas for the van," said Larry. "You would have to wait 12 hours for gas every day and they would only let you buy \$20 worth at a time." It took three, day-long trips to the gas station to fill up for the first leg of the trip to Atlanta, he said.

When they were finally able to leave Jackson and get to Atlanta, their van broke down. "We had to spend a couple of days looking for a new transmission," said Larry. "We found the closest match we could find and made it work."

With their van running again, Alicia's mother's house in Maryland was the last stop for the Knights before reaching New York three weeks after Katrina hit.

"When we got here, everything was overwhelming," said Larry. "First, because we were tired, and second, because of the outpouring from the Coast Guard and the community. I still can't express how I felt."

"I wasn't worried about Alicia and me," said Larry. "But for them to give my parents a completely furnished house was way past anything I expected."

In the end, Larry decided to stay active duty. "I really need the stability for my family." He just finished his bachelor's degree and plans to apply to Officer Candidate School, he said.

Larry's parents decided not to rebuild in New Orleans. "My mom and dad are 54 now," he said. "It's hard for them to start over." They plan to move to Virginia.

The Knights experienced first hand how swiftly the Coast Guard can be there when you need them. At Sector New York, they discovered that you don't need to be at sea to be rescued by the Coast Guard.



DEVASTATED

The living room and master bed room in EM2 Larry Knight's parents' home after Hurricane Katrina.



PIECED TOGETHER

MK1 Steven Rickards, Camaria Knight, 2, and her cousin Shairelle Knight, 8, begin a puzzle in the Knights' new home provided by the Coast Guard at Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island. The Knight family lost their home and all of their belongings in New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina. The Coast Guard community at Fort Wadsworth furnished and decorated the two apartments provided to the family of eight.

Support From Within

By the CG-1 Staff



PAC Tom Sengaro, PA/DE, New York

DEVASTATING

MK1 Steven Rickards carries toys into the new home of EM2 Larry Knight in Staten Island, NY. The Knight family lost their home and all of their belongings in New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina. The Coast Guard community at Fort Wadsworth furnished and decorated the two apartments provided to the family of eight.

The Coast Guard is well known for coming to the aid of those in need. The rescue and recovery operations directly following Hurricane Katrina were a testament of the service's dedication and commitment to serving the public. Just as strong though, is the service's commitment to supporting and taking care of its people. This was evident following Hurricane Katrina.

While Coast Guard men and women were gallantly engaged in the daunting rescue operation, the Human Resources Directorate quickly responded to support and provide the necessary benefits allowing service members to stabilize their lives and eventually recover from this tragic event. Realizing that many Coast Guardsmen who were now engaged in around-the-clock efforts to save the lives of people trapped by flooding in New Orleans also had suffered terrible losses of their own, immediate actions were initiated to come to their aid.

Some of the first actions taken actually were initiated prior to the storm. This involved working with the 8th District in the designation of "Safe Havens" and in preparing evacuation orders that would allow personnel and families to evacuate to alternate locations. After the evacuation, additional benefits included allowing authorized "Alternate Safe Havens" anywhere in the continental United States and even outside the United States if requested.

During the initial days following the storm, the focus was on providing the greatest flexibility that would allow each family to make the right decisions for itself. For families with children, the school year was just beginning, so it was important that families had options allowing them to stabilize their situation where their children could attend schools of their choice.

To support this effort, benefits were obtained authorizing members the opportunity to receive "PCS

like" entitlements to relocate where they desired, advance pay if desired and travel expenses. Coast Guard-owned quarters were made available if members desired to relocate to a Coast Guard housing site.

Besides the initial personal and dependent entitlements, the entire Coast Guard support network engaged to address members' other needs, bringing assistance from legal, medical, travel support and the Exchange System network. Maintenance Logistics Command partners, legal assistance teams, chaplain teams and civilian personnel teams deployed throughout the region to immediately assist Coast Guard personnel and their families. Travel card limits were raised, and a process was set up at Personnel Services Center to process all 8th District travel claims manually. Waivers were obtained to allow members to receive medical services through TRICARE facilities outside of their normal area; and members were assisted with insurance claims, power of attorney, general counseling, housing and entitlements needs.

The Personnel Command also sent special teams to the area to specifically talk to service members concerning future assignments, with the intent to notify personnel in the 8th District of their assignments for fiscal year 2006 as early as possible.

Early in the operations, uniforms were a key item needed by personnel. Many had lost nearly all of their uniforms due to flooded homes or damaged Coast Guard facilities. The Uniform Distribution Center in Cape May, N.J., worked for several weeks providing several thousand uniforms at no cost to personnel. In addition, nearly 10,000 outdated "working blue" uniforms were sent to Coast Guard personnel to use in areas where their regular uniforms would likely be soiled or damaged. Later, Rear Adm. Stephen Rochon, director of personnel management, led a special "Tiger Team" to meet with personnel and their families throughout the entire region to explain their benefits and entitlements. The team consisted of key support experts from headquarters and MLCLANT. Relying almost entirely on Coast Guard Auxiliary aircraft, the team visited eight sites from Mississippi to Texas in five days. The visits and town hall meetings provided people the opportunity to ask questions and better understand all of the benefits and entitlements available to them.

One of the initiatives in support of personnel was the establishment of the "Katrina Fund" sponsored by Coast Guard Mutual Assistance. Immediately following Hurricane Katrina, CGMA established a special fund directly supporting Coast Guard members affected by the hurricane. Within days of


the hurricane's passage, CGMA sent a special team throughout the area to address the immediate needs of affected personnel. Using a rented motor home, the team traveled for nearly two weeks to all sites within the Gulf Coast region to provide financial assistance to Coast Guard active duty, reserve, civilian, auxiliary and retired personnel. After Hurricane Rita struck the Texas/Louisiana coast Sept. 24, CGMA benefits were extended to families needing assistance from this region. As of Oct. 27, CGMA raised more than \$1,045,000 and provided more than \$1,665,000 in assistance to hurricane victims.

More than 750 individual families have been supported with CGMA funds. By far, most of this assistance has been related to evacuation expenses and health and safety needs such as food, temporary shelter, clothing, toiletries, medicine, gasoline, emergency travel and dependent relocation. As further financial needs become more apparent, individuals may apply for additional assistance.

Some other examples of CGMA assistance included emergency car repairs to necessitate travel to safe havens, minor house repairs, insurance deductibles, generators, roof repairs, tree removal and replacement of essential household goods. CGMA is in the process of gathering the information and documentation necessary to make grant decisions in these cases. The distribution of grants for this purpose will begin after Dec. 1.

Additionally, the Coast Guard Foundation has pledged \$1 million for personnel affected by Katrina. Working in conjunction with CGMA, the Foundation will provide grants to assist eligible personnel with personal property/household goods losses as a result of Hurricane Katrina not covered by other sources. The distribution of grants for this purpose also will begin after Dec. 1.

The work continues on many other benefits to support personnel. On a daily basis, the human resource staff engages Department of Defense counterparts and other key governmental officials to seek other entitlements or benefits in support of our personnel. Rear Adm. Kenneth Venuto, assistant commandant for human resources, and Rear Adm. Paul Higgins, director of health and safety, recently met with the Navy's Task Force Family organization to gain a better insight into what actions the other services are taking in support of their personnel.

The human resources staff will continue to work diligently doing everything within their power to see that the needs of Coast Guard personnel and their families are met. 



GARY JOHNSON, USCGAUX

DEVASTATING

AMT3 Jay Wright's helmet frames the New Orleans flooding from Hurricane Katrina. More than 700 Coast Guard personnel were affected directly by Hurricane Katrina with loss or damage to personal property.

Family Ties

Story and photos by PA3 Christopher Evanson, Lant Area

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, everything along its path of demolition conceded to its wrath. Thousands of people in the Gulf Coast region were forced to flee their homes and businesses while their futures lay uncertain.

Meet the Richards family of Mobile, Ala., Seaman Monica Richards from Coast Guard Station Pascagoula, Fla., and MK2 Phillip Richards from the CGC Decisive. In the wake of one of the most horrific natural disasters in our country's history, the Richards came to the aid of one of their shipmates in need.

Seaman Richards had evacuated and was on a station boat enroute Pensacola, Fla., the day prior to Katrina's landfall. During this time she noticed one of

her shipmates pacing.

"He looked and acted like a nervous wreck," said Richards.

The worried Coast

Guardsmen was

MK2 Joseph

Blandino, from

Station

Pascagoula.

Blandino had not

heard from his

wife, who

was eight-

months

pregnant,

and their

18-month-

old baby

girl. His

mother-

in-law

and her

two

other

children also lived in nearby Biloxi, Miss. None of them had anywhere to go.

Upon hearing his story, Monica opened up her home without hesitation to the Blandino family. Blandino's wife, Lauren, was on the road after their hometown of Ocean Springs, Miss., received a mandatory evacuation order. Blandino eventually got in touch with his wife and mother-in-law and told them to travel to Mobile, Ala. On an average day, the drive from Ocean Springs to Mobile would take 45 minutes, but this wasn't an ordinary day.

Just hours from Katrina's landfall, Lauren Blandino was in bumper-to-bumper traffic on Interstate 10, frantic that her mother wouldn't make it out of Biloxi. An exhausting three hours later, Blandino finally arrived in Mobile and was reunited with her mother, who showed up with just the clothes on her back, after an eight-hour ordeal of her own on the highway.

"I thought I would be gone for just a couple days," said Donna Stone, Lauren's mother. "Every year around this time this area gets hurricane threats, and they always miss," she added.

This hurricane, however, did not show signs of following the normal threat.

As the hurricane made landfall, these two families sat in the middle of the living room amid the glow of candles, which provided the only light in the house. As winds outside slammed the coast, no one knew what to expect.

A few days after Katrina devastated the Gulf

Coast, MK2 Richards

was on his way

home after his

ship's evacua-

tion from the

hurricane.

Little did he

know the sur-

prise that await-

ed him.

"The first thing I noticed was a tree on my roof," he said. As he approached his home, it was evident that he would be unable to pull into his driveway because a pecan tree that once stood in his front yard had collapsed onto his roof and driveway.

But the real surprise was when he opened his front door only expecting to see his wife. Instead he was

welcomed by 13 people, most of whom he had never met. "My first thought was 'who are all these people?'" said Richards.

There to greet him were Monica and his brother. Also there was Blandino's immediate family, and Blandino's mother, brother, sister, and brother-in-law.

"At first it was awkward," Richards said, "but we quickly became a family."

The meshed families soon became like a Coast Guard station. Cooking duties

were shared, and people slept all over the place. Despite the many dirty dishes and hurdles of bodies occupying the living room floor, the people in the cramped house resembled a family.


"You have got a Cajun New Orleans family mixing recipes with a Mexican-Filipino family," said Blandino.

"This was a blessing in disguise," said Monica. "I come from a big family," she said. "But before this happened, I was very lonely when my husband was underway."

"Now I have a new family," she said.

Extensive property damage was suffered by this new extended family. The Blandino family home in Ocean Springs was surveyed and deemed uninhabitable, and Stone's home in Biloxi was completely destroyed.

Diapers, clothes, food and tools were donated to the displaced families by Station Pascagoula. The Blandino's future is improving. They have found a new home and will soon be moving and starting over.

In the end, the winds of Katrina may have knocked homes off their foundations, and destroyed many valuables, but the spirits of these families remain intact. Amid the destruction and despair, a bigger and better family sprouted from the rubble. 

"This was a blessing in disguise."

— Seaman Monica Richards



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Standing in the back are Phillip and Monica Richards. After Hurricane Katrina destroyed their shipmates' homes, the Richards opened their door to Joseph Blandino, seated far right, and his family.



KATRINA MAKEOVER

Far Left, Left: Before and after photos of Station Gulfport, Miss., which was totally destroyed by Hurricane Katrina on Aug. 29.

Below: Mayday, Station Gulfport's mascot, was inside the building during the storm and was never found afterward.



Before & After

*If these walls could talk —
A personal reflection from one of
Station Gulfport's own*

Story by SN Lauren Downs, CGC Greenbrier

Camouflage Hummers, tractors, bulldozers, police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks filled the city. There were very few places with electricity or running water and the rumors of disease were spreading rapidly. The city looked like weapons of mass destruction were dropped into the heart of it.

Debris littered the streets everywhere you looked and you couldn't talk to anyone without hearing a story of loss and devastation. This is the story of Coast Guard Station Gulfport, Miss., my first unit, which was completely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

If you've ever been to a Coast Guard station, you know that the crew becomes a close-knit family. The building becomes a second home to everyone there. Some crewmembers even live at the station for up to two years. Most people spend more than half their lives there after reporting in.

Walking through Station Gulfport made it evident that there was a strong sense of pride among the crew, not only for the Coast Guard but also for the unit as a team. In the visitor waiting area was an impressive collection of sports trophies and photos of winning teams. The Sumner I. Kimball award for excellence in readiness hung proudly on the wall directly

across from the stairwell.

The station's dog, Mayday, a friendly Dalmatian-Labrador mix, was notorious for greeting people as they came upstairs. Next door to the waiting area was the obviously well-used TV room, where the majority of the crew could be found unwinding in front of the big screen. Across the hall was the training room where many hours of the day were spent.

The neighboring mess deck was the setting for quite a bit of camaraderie among the crew during the hundreds of meals they shared together. Down the hall were all the berthing rooms that had become another home to 90 percent of the personnel. The station was more

than just a place to come to work. Over time the building, in a way, became part of the crew.

Preparations for the hurricane began as early as Aug. 27, when station personnel began evacuating their families. Two days before expected landfall both of the unit's 41-foot utility boats were taken to safe haven in Baton Rouge. The day before the storm only seven people remained at the station to take care of last-minute necessities and to respond to search and rescue cases. The 25-foot response small boat was put on its trailer, ready to leave at any minute.

Some people felt that the station was a more secure building and on higher ground than their homes so

they brought their pets, a total of four dogs and a cat, up to the second floor to ride out the storm. The unit's dog 'Mayday' also stayed. The plan was for the seven remaining people to stay at the station until the commanding officer determined it was no longer safe, and then the group would evacuate to the Air National Guard base.

By 7 p.m. the station had lost all Internet access and cable TV and had no way to monitor the storm other than by radio, so the decision was made to evacuate. Together the team chose to leave the animals in a back room on the second floor, because they felt the building would be able to handle the storm. A

broadcast was made on the VHF radio notifying mariners that no one would be monitoring it and to direct their calls to Mobile, Ala. Everyone gathered their things, took one final look at the station and drove through the gate for the last time.

After arriving at the Air National Guard Base the crew set up camp in rooms they had rented. That night Katrina literally came knocking on their doors. Trees were snapping like twigs all around the building and landing on the balconies outside their rooms. Gusts of wind forced water to creep under the door of their second floor rooms. They lay in bed that night trying to imagine what they would get up to in the morning.

It wasn't until the next evening that the winds died down enough to allow them to leave the Air National Guard Base. None of them were prepared for the sights awaiting them. The simple act of driving was a challenge in itself because there were fallen trees, downed power lines and pieces of buildings covering the roads. The street signs were nowhere to be seen so the group had to rely on whatever landmarks were left to guide them. The only words they could think of to describe the city were "war zone."

After what seemed like an eternity, four of them arrived at the station, or what was left of it. They stared in disbelief at the remains of the building that was once such a huge part of their lives. No one spoke as they walked around and gazed at the skeleton left behind. The frame and roof still were standing, but the inside was completely gutted and thrown around like pieces of paper in the wind for as far as they could see. They slowly circled the area trying to distinguish what belonged where and how far it had been

scattered.

With their families evacuated, and obviously no way to stay at the station for the night, they had nowhere else to go but back to the Air National Guard base. The first night was difficult for everyone. Most of them found it hard to close their eyes without picturing everything they had just seen. They knew there was a long road ahead of them.

The next few days were a blur of activity. The few station personnel who stayed in Gulfport for the

hurricane began searching for survivors and they would continue to do so for days. The crews that took the 41-foot utility boats to Baton Rouge made their way to New Orleans and assisted with survivor evacuations of the flooded city. Everyone else eventually came back to Gulfport and helped out in every way they could. The command set up a workspace in one of the berthing rooms at the Air National Guard base, and that became the new home for Station Gulfport. A routine was gradually coming into place and reality was starting to set in under incredibly surreal circumstances.

The personnel at Station Gulfport are well-trained in handling emergency situations, but no amount of training could ever prepare them for the massive amounts of devastation and destruction that they faced. Of all the search and rescue cases they had performed, none had ever hit as close to home as did Katrina. Katrina forever will be the storm that in one day destroyed decades of memories. The men and women stationed in Gulfport won't let the absence of a building stop them from performing their duties. It was, after all, the people that gave life to the building. 🇺🇸



EYEING THE DAMAGE

Above: MSTC Timothy Shouse of MSST 91108 looks over what remains of Coast Guard Station Gulfport on Sept. 6. The Mississippi station sustained catastrophic damage following the landfall of Hurricane Katrina on Aug. 29.

Right: A window frame rests in a tree near Station Gulfport.



NON-STANDARD MOORING

A 23-foot NSB gets tossed ashore near Sector Mobile during Hurricane Katrina. All shore units located on the Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana coasts suffered some damage.

DAMAGE REPORT

Hurricane Katrina spared few Coast Guard assets when she stormed ashore on Aug. 29. Below is a listing of initial damage to Coast Guard units:

- Station Gulfport — Completely destroyed
- Station Grande Isle — Heavy damage
- Station New Orleans — Water and wind damage
- Station Dauphin Island — Flood and wind damage
- Station Pascagoula — Major flood and wind damage
- Station Venice — Major flood and wind damage
- Air Station New Orleans — Water and wind damage
- ATC Mobile — Hangar and Gulf Strike Team roof damaged
- Sector Mobile — Significant water damage
- ISC New Orleans — Significant water and wind damage
- Sector New Orleans — Flood and roof damage

"It was simply incredible how crews from these stations found ways to stay operational throughout the Katrina response," said Lt. Cmdr. John Slaughter, executive officer of the Civil Engineering Unit based in Miami.

According to Slaughter, all but two locations (Station Gulfport and ISC New Orleans) will be rebuilt by next June. Costs to rebuild are estimated at \$190 million.



Staying In the LOOP

CGC Northland conducts security boardings on ships stopped by storm

Story and photos by PA1 Dana Warr, 7th Dist.



AUTOGRAPH SESSION

MK2 Steve Fleming signs the log book aboard the motor tanker Nord Sea during a Maritime Security Act inspection in the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port Sept. 17.

Most shipping traffic headed to ports along the Gulf Coast came to a screeching halt when the Coast Guard made mandatory closures 24 hours before Hurricane Katrina slammed into the coastlines.

With commercial vessels stacking up outside the ports, the Coast Guard worked quickly with the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration to get the ports surveyed and re-opened so vital commerce could begin entering the states again.

With so many other Coast Guard units fully engaged in search and rescue, pollution response and aids-to-navigation efforts, the crew of the Portsmouth, Va.-based CGC Northland was called in to make sure all the commercial vessels stacked up offshore met the full requirements of the Maritime Transportation Security Act before they could enter port.

"Everyone aboard wanted to do their part in support of the response efforts of Hurricane Katrina," said Cmdr. Michael Giglio, commanding officer of the Northland.

The Northland team focused mostly on vessels in the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port arriving from foreign ports like the motor tanker Nord Sea, which left Hong Kong carrying natural gas. Other ships entering U.S. ports were carrying crude oil, ammonium nitrate, methanol and grain.

"We do an initial safety inspection as soon as we get on board and then check the ship's documentation and crew's passports," said Ensign Kyle Weist, boarding officer and crewmember on the



Northland. "We really get a good picture of who and what is coming in days before they arrive," said Weist.

The Northland crew was not the only Coast Guard asset fulfilling the homeland security missions. Crews from the CGCs Shamal, Harriet Lane and Confidence boarded more than 30 vessels between Sept. 4 and Sept. 20.

"No matter if it's search and rescue or maritime security, we're all doing our part and making a difference," said Giglio.

After working in the LOOP, the Northland crew relieved the CGC Harriet Lane as the operating command post for Coast Guard assets in New Orleans. 🇺🇸

SECURE PRESENCE

The Portsmouth, Va.-based CGC Northland lies off the motor tanker Nord Sea during a homeland security boarding in the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port Sept. 17.

All is still, but is it safe?

Story by PA1 Danielle DeMarino,
PADET St. Petersburg

Overwhelmed by the shocking images of twisted trucks and bare foundations, few grief-stricken citizens may have stopped to think about the seemingly smaller yet potentially deadly material that took flight during Hurricane Katrina's more than 100-mph fury.

The Coast Guard Gulf Strike Team at Aviation Training Center Mobile, Ala., couldn't stop thinking about the possibilities.

As environmental pollution response experts, they knew the sky had literally set the limit when it came to the sheer magnitude of hazardous materials that may have been disturbed. They also knew time was not on their side.

Immediately following the hurricane's landfall, an assessment and clean-up operation began. According to CWO Rod Elkins, operations officer for the Gulf Strike Team, triaging the area for immediate danger to life and the environment was first on the to-do list and one of the key parts to a response.

TESTING AND TREATING

Lt. Cmdr. Ed Bock returns from a safety inspection of a controlled burn at the Chevron Empire oil facility in Buras, La., on Oct. 12. The fire was started to burn off crude oil that was blown into the area marsh by Hurricane Katrina.

PA3 Robert M. Reed, 8th Dist.



PA1 Danielle DeMarino, PADET St. Petersburg

Team members trekked across the states of Alabama and Mississippi, visiting all ports, marinas, regulated facilities and more. However, this was easier said than done.



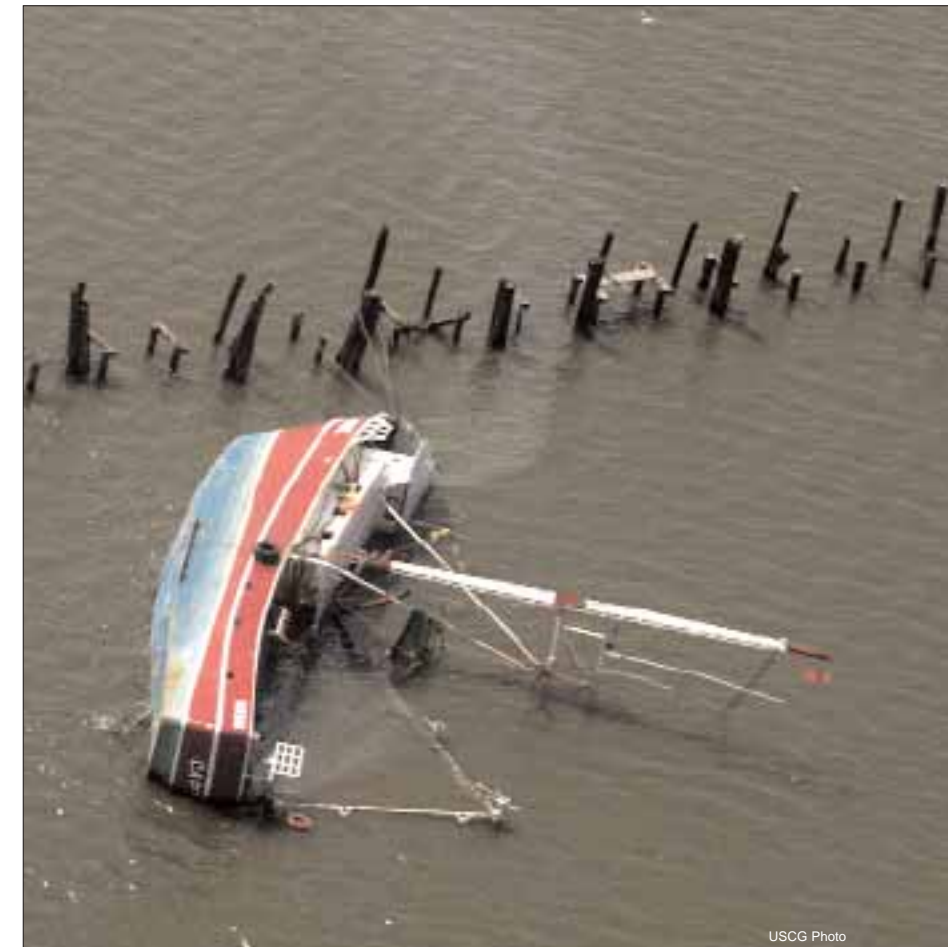
PA3 Prentice Danner, PADET Los Angeles

According to the Strike Team's executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. James Elliott, the biggest challenge was assessing the expansive area with limited personnel and gaining access to areas where the roads and bridges had been destroyed and the waterways strewn with debris. It took almost a week to conduct the reconnaissance mission using multiple aircraft, boats and vehicles. What they found were more than 500 grounded vessels and more than 2,300 hazardous material cases to address.

The sheer enormity of the situation was only outdone by its danger. The already hazardous environments were compounded by the unknown, such as entering damaged facilities containing a mixture of potentially toxic chemicals. One such excursion included a team fully donned with protective gear going into the State of Mississippi Forensic Laboratory in Biloxi. Other duties for the Strike Team included cleaning up chemical and biological waste from

chemical manufacturers and hospitals.

With such intensive tasks at hand, it's good to have partners. Elkins attributes the productivity of the Strike Team to the relationship the Coast Guard has cultivated with the Environmental Protection Agency and other federal, state and local agencies. He noted that working closely in a non-emergency environment on a daily basis and conducting unified pre-storm planning was what made for such a smooth-running multi-agency response effort. Immediately following the storm's landfall, Strike Team members formed a unified command with those agencies and got to work.



USCG Photo

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Top Left: DCC Michael Arnold stayed busy canvassing items such as displaced propane tanks and mysterious metal drums for dangerous leaks.

Above Left: A member of the Strike Team samples oil at a spill site near Port Hache, La., on Sept. 14.

Above: Overhead view of a capsized fishing boat just south of Murphy Oil Corporation in Meraux, La. The Gulf Strike Team has more than 2,300 hazardous material cases to address.

Although the Strike Team has facilitated the cleaning up of the majority of oil, prevented major hazardous material releases, secured everything from displaced propane tanks to buildings holding biological contaminants, and made exposure to the area safe for the public, Elliott estimates there is still enough work to keep them busy for several months to come. ☛



Oily Aftermath

Story and photos by PA2 Mike Lutz, PADET New York

A clear visible black film covers dozens of neighborhoods and protected marshes and swamp lands along the mighty Mississippi River. After the water receded, the environmental impact of Hurricane Katrina and Rita's fury could be seen on the welcome mats of vacated homes throughout southern Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

The total devastation left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina paralyzed the oil and gas infrastructure throughout the region, which required an unprecedented, simultaneous response covering more than 130 miles of river, canals and wetlands.

A major oil spill is characterized as any spill over 100,000 gallons. Hurricane Katrina pounded Louisiana, resulting in six major spills and three medium spills that released an estimated 8 million gallons of product.

SOAKING IT UP

Contractors place absorbent pads on surface oil at the Bass Enterprises South Facility on Oct. 6. A unified command comprised of the Coast Guard and dozens of other organizations are focusing cleanup efforts here and in other locations throughout southeast Louisiana.



“We have approximately 750 responders from federal, state, local agencies; cleanup contractors; and nearly 120 Coast Guard men and women from all reaches of the Atlantic and Pacific areas actively engaged in the cleanup,” said Lt. Cmdr. Richard Campbell, maritime pollution response deputy incident commander at Forward Operating Base Baton Rouge, La.

Hurricane Rita made landfall on Sept. 24 and quickly began to pound the already devastated region.

Operations had to be stopped in preparation of Hurricane Rita’s arrival. Equipment and personnel were moved from the staging area in Baton Rouge, La., to Huntsville, Ala., to wait out the second hurricane to hit the area in as many months.

“Looking back at the events as they unfolded, two storms, a total shut down of operations and evacuation of all personnel and reconstitution, it’s incomprehensible,” said Campbell.

As unbelievable as the task was, Coast Guard and assisting agencies worked day and night to clean up the mess.

“Logistically, responding to and managing a disaster of this

magnitude is equal to standing up an 800-person corporation, overnight,” said Cmdr. Ronald Cantin, maritime pollution response unified commander at Forward Operating Base Baton Rouge.

More than 1.7 million gallons of recoverable oil was contained inside 31,300 feet of boom. Boom was used to corral oil to stop it from spreading. Skimmers then sucked up the oil and placed it into storage tanks. The response crews used 44 skimmers and 34 storage boxes.

and 1.5 million gallons had been naturally dispersed. Another 3 million gallons had been recovered from the various sites by that date.

An end to the massive cleanup, however, is nowhere in sight.

“Currently (as of Sept. 29), operations continue at nine sites with gross oil removal wrapping up at four sites,” said Campbell. “Additionally, we have a 12-person pollution investigations team working over 100 storm-related oil

Then, along came Rita. Pollution inspectors, however, were able to breath a sigh of relief as Rita’s impact was negligible.

“The majority of the existing spills remained well-contained during Rita and responders continue to clean up,” said Capt. Frank Paskewich, the Sector New Orleans commanding officer and federal on-scene coordinator. “Any oil that escaped the booms flowed inland, away from the river levees. Only a few minor oil sheens thin enough to evaporate in the sun have appeared on the river.”

As of Sept. 29, an estimated 1.7 million gallons had evaporated

discharges throughout the area. Each case is prioritized, investigated and resolved either through the owner taking action or a rapid response team providing on-site mitigation.”

Coast Guard members and contractors in the field have had to face numerous hurdles during the response including heat stress and dehydration. They also have had to deal with a plethora of insects, poisonous snakes and alligators.

“The Louisiana environment is certainly unique,” said Paskewich. “No two spills are alike. This is certainly a large spill, but our responders are well trained.”

Snakes and alligators were not the only road blocks the teams

faced.

“Lack of available berthing, unreliable communications, impassable roadways and remoteness of response sites all significantly hamstrung our efforts,” said Campbell. “Just one of these hurdles at just one major spill would pose a significant challenge to any unit. Remarkably, these folks overcame all of them.”

Even with all these obstacles, teamwork and perseverance kept the oil from affecting the environment further.

“The Coast Guard continues to set the bar in numerous facets of this catastrophic incident,” said Campbell.

For many of those on scene, the tragedy hit very close to home.

OILY QUILT

A contractor places absorbent pads on surface oil at the Bass Enterprises South Facility in Cox Bay, La., on Oct 6. An estimated 3.8 million gallons of oil were released at this facility.

“We have about 10 people from Sector New Orleans working with us who were affected in some way,” said Canton. “Three of them lost everything during this tragedy, but each and every one has chosen to work at the forward operating base to assist in the recovery.”

While the hurricanes may have invoked images of heroic helicopter rescues and flooded streets, many of Katrina’s heroes were in the trenches fighting the environmental effects of the storm. 🦋



PAC2/MARINA O'LEARY, PACAREA

SAMPLING A SPILL

BM1 Quoen Harris of Atlantic Strike Team, based in Fort Dix, N.J., takes a sample at the Sundown East oil spill site in Potash, La., on Sept. 16.



NATIVE SPECIES

Contractors recovered, cleaned and released an alligator at the Bass Enterprises South Facility in Cox Bay, La., on Oct. 6.



Towering Transmission

Rescue 21 tools restore vital communications in Katrina's aftermath

Story by PA2 Judy Silverstein
USCGR

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Rescue 21 team worked tirelessly to restore full maritime SAR/Command and Control communications in the Venice and Port Sulphur region of Louisiana as towers lay sidelined or destroyed.

Even though the Coast Guard's new command and control system is just nearing its interim operating capability, contingency planning allowed the Coast Guard to deploy its portable communication towers, or

Disaster Recovery System, before the full Rescue 21 communications system is functional and ensured

DISASTER RECOVERY SYSTEM

The 17-ton, 127-foot tall DRS travelled from Arizona in time to provide critical maritime communications following Hurricane Katrina.

communications for mariners in the storm-ravaged area.

"The tower is providing badly needed communications in a very busy area of commerce," said Cmdr. Todd Turner, deputy project manager for Rescue 21. "We're able to hear boaters in an area of 5,000 square miles, and for those with more high-powered commercial radios, even further."

Despite adverse conditions, technicians and engineers deployed the stand-alone tower, which is not reliant upon the Internet, electricity or communications. The system has its own generator and satellite connectivity to the Coast Guard's Operations Systems Center in Martinsburg, W.Va.

"As we were looking for an operational test and evaluation opportunity for our Rescue 21 disaster recovery assets, the operational Coast Guard was confronted with a real communications gap. The two needs were a perfect match," said Capt. Dan Abel, project manager of Rescue 21.

"This would be the first time we field tested the 17-ton portable system," said Lt. Cmdr. Thomas Norton, the project resident office prospective commanding officer.

Working long hours, crews reviewed the technically challenging intricacies of a satellite link directly to the OSC.

While they hammered out

a system of configurations, watchstanders from 9th District were notified to report to West Virginia. The concept of Rescue 21 disaster recovery operations employs a "shadow group radio console" already installed at OSC. Though the Coast Guard's central communications hub is a natural choice for a downlink site, every piece of the innovative scenario provided engineers with challenges.

"The tower had been designed as a critical emergency communications system in the aftermath of a crisis, but when towers had been obliterated, we had to go back to the drawing board," Norton said. "Without the system configured in that region, its effectiveness was something of an unknown."

Working alongside crews from General Dynamics C4 Systems, teams improvised nearly every step of the way. From using buoy sinkers provided by the CGC Clamp to anchor the massive tower into soggy ground, to avoiding flammable, sulfurous land, innovation was the key to success, Norton said.

Shortly after being declared functional, watchstanders received a clear transmission from the tugboat Douglas after the vessel struck a barge in the southern portion of the Mississippi River and began taking on water. "The Disaster Recovery System's successful deployment leveraged the best of Coast Guard ingenuity and industry-provided technology," said Abel.



MULTI MISSION

A Coast Guard HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter from Kodiak, Alaska, drops a sandbag to help repair a damaged levee in New Orleans Sept. 29. The Coast Guard dropped 18,000 pounds of sand while working with the National Guard.

Ice cream man

Stop him while he's passing by

The Air Station New Orleans Command Master Chief, AETCM Tim Sheffler, was a shining star among many during the rescue and recovery operations of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. His commitment to all Coast Guardsmen from units throughout the Gulf Coast was evident throughout every aspect of the day-to-day operations at the air station and surrounding units. Sheffler used skills and obtained "lagniappe" (New Orleans term for a little something extra) for the crew — everything from ice cream to T-shirts to steak dinners to morale cell phones.

"He was everywhere and everything — a real heart of gold," said Lt. Olav Saboe from Air Station New Orleans.



AETCM Tim Sheffler and his pet rat, Blue.

His compassion didn't just stop with the Coast Guard; working through his senior enlisted network, he was able to get

many of the same items for the DoD and National Guard units based in Belle Chasse in support of post-Katrina recovery efforts.

Story and photos by Cmdr. Scott Kitchen, Air Station New Orleans

Making the impossible possible

After Hurricane Katrina hit the New Orleans area, the majority of the 8th District staff components moved to the federal building in St. Louis, which is home to the Integrated Support Command, Marine Safety Office and Electronic Support Unit. To meet this requirement, ESU St. Louis personnel needed to install new workspaces for 130 personnel within four days.

The project included installing 30,000 feet of cabling for phones and computers. ESU St. Louis had to build and deploy all of the computer equipment and phone instruments on a quickly evolving floor plan.

For the next four days and nights, the IT staff and additional support personnel located all of the necessary equipment and began creating 8th District Lite: 12,500 square feet of floor tiles were pulled, cable was run, network racks were installed and phone switches were configured. When they were done, the 8th District staff members were able to move in and gain access to workspaces.

Story and photos by Mike Hauptert, ESU St. Louis



Reeling from Rita

Hurricane Rita's force caused the Gulf of Mexico's waters to push northward, inundating the low-lying areas of Southwestern Louisiana and stranding residents. An Air Station New Orleans HH-65B launched to search for survivors in the widespread flood zone Sept. 24. Fresh from flying several missions during Hurricane Katrina, the crew began having feelings of déjà vu. After surveying several empty rooftops scattered between miles of farmland, they quickly realized that they would not be as busy with rescues as they were with Katrina. However, they did not let the initial desolation stop them from scouring the area for people in need.

About halfway through their first sortie, the crew spotted a person stranded on high ground near the approach to a bridge on Louisiana Highway 82.

The storm surge made a narrow island out of the high-

way, which the helicopter crew used to their advantage, landing and embarking the survivor. Then the crew used the rescued man's local knowledge to find areas where more survivors might be. Based on the advice of the survivor and a Vermilion Parish Sheriff's deputy who was also aboard, the crew continued to search along Highway 82.

Just before the helicopter had to turn away and refuel, a man and a woman holding up an empty jug of water flagged down the helicopter from their porch. The crew hoisted the couple into the HH-65B and delivered all three Hurricane Rita survivors to Abbeville, La., where they received emergency food, water and shelter.

Story by Lt. Kevin Crecy, Air Station New Orleans



HELPING HANDS

An Air Station New Orleans HH-65B helicopter landed on LA Hwy. 82. This image was taken from the vantage point of a Hurricane Rita survivor standing at the approach to a bridge on LA Hwy. 82. The HH-65B embarked the survivor and evacuated him to Abbeville, La.

Atlantic City air crew recounts Katrina rescues

As is always the case in the Coast Guard, flexibility was the word of the day for rescue crews in Mobile, Ala.

When a four-man crew left together to do their part in the rescue efforts in New Orleans, they soon began operating with whatever and whenever necessary.

Cmdr. Dan Taylor wrote Sept. 1, "Last night I flew with a mechanic from Aviation Training Center Mobile. Our mech flew with an ATC Mobile crew. He is bunking with our swimmer who returned about 6 a.m. this morning. The mech saved 10 and delivered lots of water and MREs throughout the area.

"The enormity of the disaster is beyond words. The Coast Guard response is equally amazing. The Atlantic City crew and aircraft is just one small piece of an extraordinary relief operation. When we were refueling once at Coast Guard Air Station New Orleans, we stopped and

counted 21 Coast Guard, DOD and EMS helicopters on the ramp being turned around to go back in to save more."

During Taylor's afternoon rescue flight, he and his crew picked up a nine-month-pregnant woman from the Superdome who went into labor in the helicopter. Once they landed at Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, the woman safely delivered her baby after being carried from the helicopter by stretcher. They also hoisted another pregnant woman from an apartment building and four people with their two pit bulls.

In all, Taylor's crew saved 24 people and delivered 500 pounds of water and MREs during Sept. 2 rescue operations.

PA1 Kimberly Smith, PADET Atlantic City, N.J.

PSC instills hope in many evacuees

The Personnel Service Center stepped into action when Hurricane Katrina knocked out seven Servicing Personnel Offices, which impacted over 3,000 Coast Guardsmen. The PSC staff worked long hours counseling members and instilling hope during an otherwise helpless situation.

The Customer Care Branch responded by working extra hours and taking hundreds of calls ranging from inaccessible bank accounts to CGMA requests from families seeking instructions on where to go.

Four PSC reservists were dispatched to ISC St. Louis to help prepare over 5,000 evacuation orders and provide initial support. Describing her experience, YNC Kim Finley said, "We worked anywhere from 12 to 16 hours a day for 19 days straight. We finally had to take a day off after running out of clean clothes." PSC's only hospital corpsman, HS2 Mike Daley, and experts from the Travel Branch also were sent to disaster areas to provide direct support and guidance.

PSC's supply and information technology staffs quickly established an 8th District contingency senior petty officer workroom, which was initially staffed by five PSC employees. Within a week, ten additional yeomen arrived from various units. The SPO painstakingly gathered information over the phone to make Direct Access entries and assist with travel claims for thousands of members from 107 displaced units. Among the volunteers was YNC Jeffery Anderson whose time at PSC was cut short when Hurricane Rita hit his home in Galveston, Texas.

In collaboration with policy makers, new travel and pay procedures were developed "on the fly" by PSC experts to alleviate hardships created by the storms. Over 1,500 evacuation travel claims were processed within weeks of Katrina and another 8,500 claims are expected.

YNCS Mark Planitz, PSC

Night vision



EYES ON THE HORIZON

The motor tanker, Energy Spirit, viewed from the CGC Northland, while in transit just outside the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port Sept. 16.

PAT DANA WARR, PADET Miami

Camp Katrina

We've all heard about the heroics Coast Guard men and women performed from Pascagoula, Miss., to Houston, but they were not the only heroes who were performing above expectations. They were just the ones on the front lines.

The first week after Katrina, aircrews from Coast Guard Air Station New Orleans were lucky enough to come back to dry land. Unfortunately, there was no electricity or running water, MREs and water were the choice for a meal, and sleeping arrangements meant that anywhere a body could lay down in relative quiet was a bed.

The hangar had lost 60 feet of roof, the entire east

lean-to of the hangar was condemned and bathrooms consisted of a portable restroom. The aircrews had it better than most. With an increased operations tempo, living this lifestyle was a disaster in the making.

To help improve things, the ground operations crew brainstormed a list of priorities. The first priority was to find sleeping arrangements for the flyers that would actually allow them to rest. This was resolved when a port security unit arrived and set up four air-conditioned field tents, which slept 14 people. The second priority was to clean up the massive amount of trash and debris caused by Hurricane Katrina and by the daily living of 200 people. For a week there had been no trash removed, no floors swept and a vast amount of cargo flown in for use at the air station for further delivery to other units in the area.

Then the ground operations crew arrived. The Atlantic Strike Team sent in MKCS Charlie Keegan, who took

over the day-to-day running of most ground operations. MST2 Stephan Brown, who had less than six months in the Coast Guard, was able to conjure up almost anything using a cell phone like a modern-day genie. These two Strike Team members replaced MKC David Wojciechowski and MK1 Scott Galvin, who were moved to another hotspot.

Eventually, travel trailers, recreational trailers, double-wide trailers, shower trailers, field kitchen trailers and even portable restroom trailers showed up. The personnel from Civil Engineering Unit Miami laid out the city design and "Camp Katrina" was born. Currently,

with over 60 trailers, and thanks to the crew of the Emergency Response Team from St. Louis, Camp Katrina can not only sleep almost 200 guests, it can surge up 168 more in the double-wides if necessary. The Emergency Response Team personnel, working hand-in-hand with the Air Station Public Works crew, have hard-wired each trailer into shore power, backed up by generators; laid sidewalks; and have plumbed in a laundry facility, shower trailers and the kitchen. Reservist CWO Jim Wall and SK1 Ron Nickey

oversee the day-to-day running of Camp Katrina.

The list goes on. ESU and ISC crews, reservists from all over and auxiliarists all have worked behind the scene to make things at Air Station New Orleans as normal as normal can be. Every one of them does their part willingly, happily and above all expectations to make things as good as can be for their shipmates.

These are the unsung heroes of New Orleans.

Story and photo courtesy of AETCM Tim Sheffler, CMC, Air Station New Orleans





Operation Life Ring

Story by Rob Westcott, BC-APA National Press Corps

When Auxiliarist Bruce Dyleski and his wife, Joy, returned to their home in Waveland, Miss., Sept. 7, they found little that resembled their former life. Their cozy home and the neighborhood around it were flattened by Hurricane Katrina. As Dyleski put it, “The sea came in and washed Waveland away.”

“The hurricane took our home away and with it our stuff. We did take the important things, at least they seemed important: photos, scrapbooks, Joy’s quilts and a few other mementos of our lives, but the rest is a scattered rubble pile three houses up the block,” he added.

A journal entry by Bruce in late June 2002 described the life that had been lost.

“Late June 2002: I think our arrival at Waveland to be a bit magical. The Aiken Road house is funky, a very nice funky. All wood floors, beamed ceiling, a big screened front porch. The street is one-car wide set among live oaks. The beach, the Gulf of Mexico, is only one long block away. Turning off Beach Blvd., Aiken Road winds through cathedral oaks hung with moss. The house is in trees with a giant oak next door and next door to that ... it is that big! So our arrival is grand. Joy is already putting up quilts and pictures on the walls. I feel like we are on vacation, this being the type of place people come over to rent for a week at the beach. We call it home now ... It is our dream starting to materialize and I didn’t believe it would ever be this nice.”

As Dyleski surveyed the rubble before him, memories of his time in Waveland came in waves of a different kind. Memories and a perspective on life changed forever.

He wrote in a letter after the storm: “We are a most fortunate society and any of this good fortune can be taken away at any time. Appreciate what you have, focus on what is real and lasting, live your life today as best you can. The week before the storm came, I sat every

morning in the chair and sipped my coffee and it ran thru my mind just how rich my life had been on Aiken Road. Though we had little money, few possessions and nothing of real value except our families and the love Joy and I had shared. It is so strange now that those thoughts came to me every day that week and that journal entry of July 3, the last Aiken Road journal were so prophetic.”

Surveying the rubble, Bruce and Joy made a find. “The first thing I found of ours was a large decorative plate. It had been on top of a cabinet above our stove leaning against the wall. How it landed safely in the front yard I don’t know. The roof of the house was across the street and was probably blown off before the wave ever got there. But the plate, how did it make it?”

Little things mean a lot when you have lost virtually everything.

Other auxiliarists came and stood by Dyleski’s side. Many of them had suffered losses, but they were there for their fellow auxiliarists. Flotilla member Al Benjamin, who had evacuated to another state, offered Bruce and Joy his home while they surveyed the damage in Waveland and tried to salvage what they could of their possessions. Others offered needed emotional support.

In the aftermath of Katrina, the Coast Guard Auxiliary launched Operation Life Ring, and for people like Bruce and Joy, the Life Ring got thrown at just the right time.

Commodore Joe Taylor was tasked with the coordination of Life Ring efforts in the ravaged area, and with the assistance of Coast Guard Mutual Assistance staff, met with auxiliarists at Coast Guard stations in Diamondhead, Miss., Pascagoula, Miss., and Gulfport, La.

Bruce and Joy — and, as of Oct. 2, approximately two dozen other Auxiliary families — were given no-interest Coast Guard Mutual Assistance loans of up to \$5,000 per family. There is no payment expected on the loan for six months.

According to Taylor, this was the first time this many

auxiliarists have needed mutual assistance.

While some had insurance [and others had none], there was a real need for immediate funds that insurance wasn’t providing. “Many have insurance, but that takes time,” Taylor said. “The loans will give them capital to operate on in the interim.”

Loans were given right on the spot, and Dyleski was amazed at the speed of the loan (five minutes) and the lack of “red tape.”

In the typical spirit of the Auxiliary, more than one auxiliarist told Taylor they would not take a Mutual Assistance loan if it deprived others of a loan.

These loans won’t meet all needs, according to Taylor. Some families were so devastated they will need grants, where no repayment is expected.

Here, Taylor says, is where the donations to Operation Life Ring will come in. As the Auxiliary association

receives donations to Operation Life Ring, a fund will be built up from which individual need-based grants can be made. This will be particularly needed by members of Flotillas 48, 35, 41 and 33, which Taylor says were “hammered” by the storm.

The need for these donations is real and immediate, said Taylor.

For Bruce and Joy Dyleski and countless others like them, the process of rebuilding their lives has begun. With all of their belongings in the back of their truck, the couple left Mississippi for the last time and joined relatives in Texas. Auxiliarists in Texas will be there ready to be their new Auxiliary family.

Moving ahead for others may be more difficult, but there will be the common thread of a caring Auxiliary family. ☛



PHOTO BY MARK WOLFE, FEMA

HELPING THE SURVIVORS

A Disaster Medical Assistance Team treats patients in Waveland, Miss., Sept. 11. DMAT teams help hospitals in disaster areas.

An army of ANTs

Story by CWO Anthony Marinelli, Sector New Orleans, with contributions by BMCS Robert Johnson, CGC Axe. Photos by PA3 Gretchen Eddy, 7th Dist.

Katrina's eye made landfall in Buras, La., where the Officer in Charge of Aids to Navigation Team Venice, BMC Brad Vandiver, and his wife and son lived in a Coast Guard-owned house. Needless to say, they don't live in Buras anymore, nor does

Vandiver work in Venice anymore.

Katrina's winds and unprecedented storm surge destroyed or damaged most of the aids to navigation along the Gulf Coast from Port Fourchon, La., to Mobile Bay, Ala.; in the Mississippi River from its entrance,

250 miles up river to Baton Rouge; the entire Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet; and in most of the inland and Gulf Intracoastal Waterways in eastern Louisiana, Mississippi and western Alabama.

In addition to ANT Venice, both ANT New Orleans' and Gulfport's facilities were also destroyed, as well as the Sector New Orleans' ATON office and equipment storage located at ISC New Orleans on the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal in the lower 9th Ward of New Orleans.

Most of the personnel from these units, as well as the crews of the CGC Pamlico and the CGC Axe, were themselves personally affected by Katrina. Some people lost trees, some a few shingles, some their roofs and others their entire homes. Yet, as soon as Katrina passed, they all left their families at safe havens and returned to duty. During the first days following landfall they assisted in the largest urban search and rescue mission ever seen in this country, and for the next three months — with more months to follow — to restore the roughly 1,000 aids to navigation discrepancies in the Sector New Orleans area of responsibility alone, caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Personnel and resources from five of the seven Sector New Orleans' ATON units, and CGC Clamp, which had been passing through New Orleans en route Galveston following a drydock period in Alabama, played major parts in the post-storm res-

cue and security operation. Simultaneously, ATON teams from Florida, with assistance from local commercial towing vessels, restored temporary aids to navigation in the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway from the Mississippi Sound to the Mississippi River, allowing badly needed petroleum products to flow freely to the Mississippi coast. Immediately following completion of the urban rescue, while most responders were demobilizing and tending to their own personal situations, Sector New Orleans ATON personnel and resources went directly to work to reopen the Mississippi River by restoring the critical aids to navigation along the river and allowing for the resumption of the free flow of commerce in the badly damaged region.

The CGC Axe is a tug/barge combination that does ATON construction. The tug Axe is in the Coast Guard Yard undergoing a yearlong total overhaul. The barge and crew remained behind at their homeport.

When Katrina hit, several of the CGC Axe crew were aboard the CGC Pamlico augmenting them and assisting with towing the barge and doing hurricane avoidance. After Katrina's passage and being released from evacuation operations, the barge was towed by a commercial tug over to Pascagoula, Miss., where it was met by the CGC Wedge, a river buoy tender tug/barge combo. Members of the Axe worked alongside the Wedge crew to rebuild the navigational aids leading to the large naval shipyard in Pascagoula as well as the huge Chevron refinery and Port of Pascagoula facility at Bayou Casotte. Together, they built eight range towers

and more than 25 lateral navigational markers. As soon as the channel was open, oil tankers began a steady procession to the refinery delivering crude for processing.

With New Orleans and the parishes to its south completely destroyed and shut down, Sector New Orleans and ANT New Orleans were forced to relocate base operations west, to ANT Morgan City, La. By the time the New Orleans personnel arrived in Morgan City, materials and assistance were already on scene. And more were arriving from all over the country, from as far west as Corpus Christi Texas, as far east as Portsmouth, Va., and as far north as Cleveland, Ohio. As personnel and Coast Guard resources arrived on scene, they were loaded, tasked and dispatched: the CGC Hatchet from Galveston, Texas; CGC Greenbrier from Natchez, Miss.; and boats and crews from ANTs Corpus Christi, Port O'Connor and Sabine, Texas. The CGC Clamp arrived from New Orleans to load and return to the mouth of the Mississippi, but their efforts to continue to help were thwarted by recurring ships-service generator fires.

The CGC Pamlico and a team from ANT Venice, led by BMC Vandiver, diverted directly from rescue operations in New Orleans to the mouth of the Mississippi River and began a south-to-north ATON recovery operation. They cleared the grounds at ANT Venice of debris and dead animals in preparation for the arrival of additional materials. The Hatchet and Greenbrier loaded as much ATON construction material as they could carry and headed for Venice, where the materials were stored and loaded on every available cutter. The Hatchet remained and constructed aids while the Greenbrier returned to Morgan City for additional materials. ANTs New Orleans and Morgan City, augmented by crews from the dry-docked CGC Axe and the Texas ANT crews, simultaneously repaired the shore-based aids along both sides of the Mississippi River, from Baton Rouge down to New Orleans. The



NAVIGATIONAL AIDS

Two crewmembers from ANT Charleston, S.C., get ready to set a buoy in the Gulf Coast Waterway near Gulfport, Miss., after Hurricane Katrina destroyed most of the navigational aids.



NEVER ENDING WORK

A seaman from ANT Jacksonville, Fla., makes sure the buoys and other navigational aids are securely placed in the trucks and boats for the long drive to Gulfport, Miss.



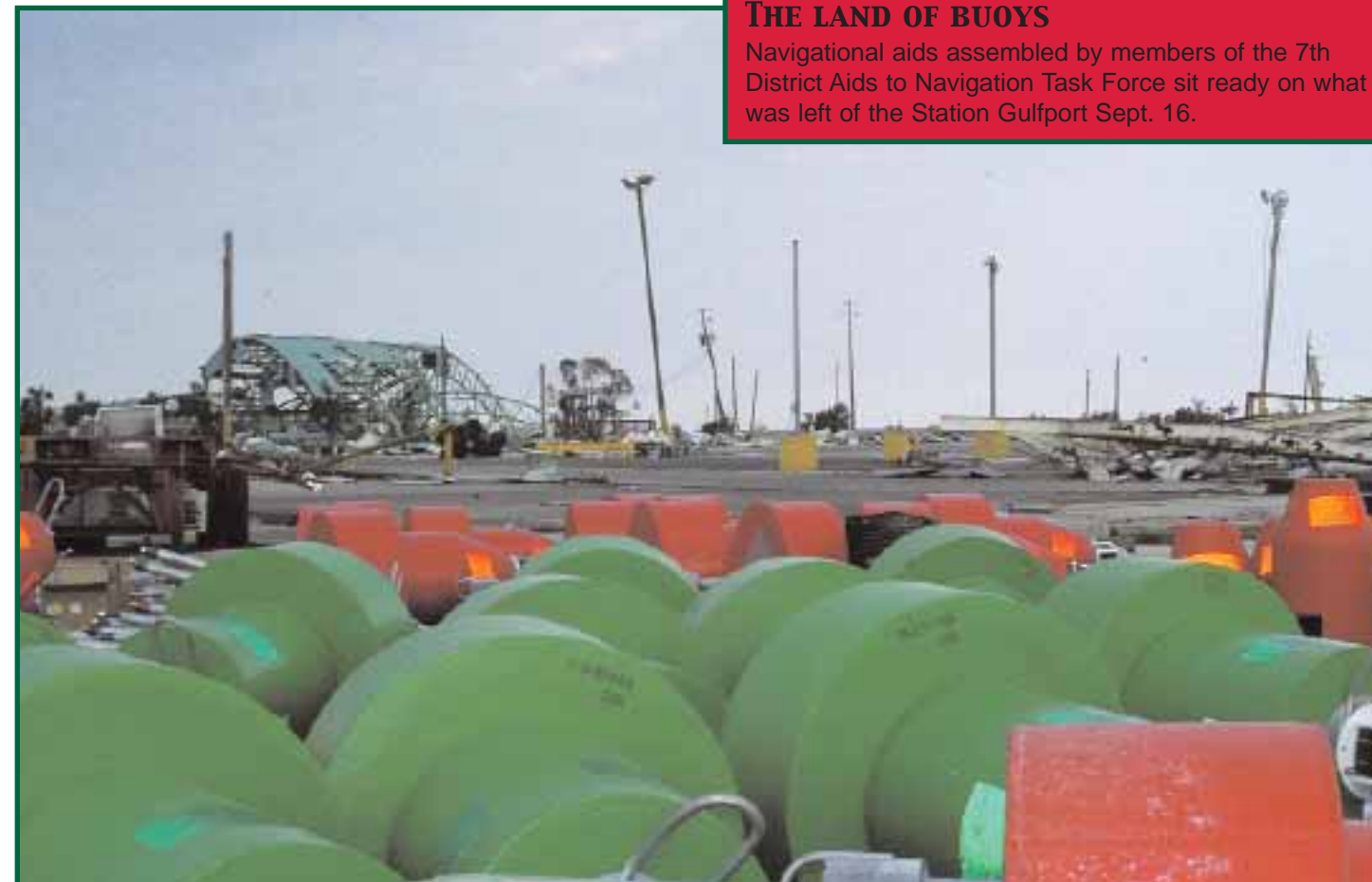
CGC Harry Claiborne checked every floating aid from the mouth of the river to Baton Rouge.

Just as ATON restoration in the Mississippi River was in full swing, Hurricane Rita began her approach to the Gulf Coast, forcing all New Orleans' ATON resources to once again evacuate. Rita made landfall on Oct. 24 at the Louisiana/Texas border, bringing with her Category 3 winds and a 20-foot storm surge. The Louisiana waterways that had been previously minimally affected or completely unaffected by Katrina were now also destroyed by Rita. In addition to these ATON damages, of the two Sector NOLA ANT facilities remaining operational following Katrina, ANT Dulac, located 50 miles south of Houma, La., suffered from five feet of flooding inside their office and shop spaces. But before ANT Dulac's team could attend to the daunting tasks of recovering both their facilities and their waterways, they first were involved in the rescue and recovery of their own neighbors, who had been caught in the unexpected flood. Three hundred fifty local people were rescued and evacuated to safe ground.

Hurricane Rita had affected not only Louisiana's western waterways, east from Port Fourchon (again), west to Freshwater Bayou, and ANT Dulac's operational facilities, but also wiped out the ATON systems in two of Sector Galveston's major waterways: Calcasieu Channel, leading to the Port of Lake Charles, La., and the only LNG facilities on the Gulf Coast; and Sabine

Channel, leading to Port Arthur, Texas. The construction tenders that had been on loan from Galveston — the CGCs Hatchet and Clamp — now had to be diverted to the Sabine area to rebuild ATONs in their own waterways. This left the Pamlico the only remaining construction tender for Louisiana, weary after four solid weeks of urban SAR and ATON recovery. While the Pamlico took a two-week rest, the CGC Hudson, on loan from Sector Miami and assisting Sector Mobile, was diverted to the mouth of the Mississippi River to finish critical aid restoration. By the end of October, all of the critical aids in the Mississippi River that could be rebuilt with Coast Guard resources were once again watching properly, and the entire lower Mississippi River, from the Southwest Pass Entrance to Baton Rouge, was reopened to unrestricted day and night deep-draft traffic.

The Hudson continued rebuilding aids until all of the lateral lights in the lower Mississippi River were restored and watching properly. The Hudson was released back to Sector Miami and was finally allowed to return home — just in time for Hurricane Wilma. While a few of the rebuilds have been contracted out, one construction tender crew, from the CGC Pamlico, remains to make the remaining repairs. 🇺🇸



THE LAND OF BUOYS

Navigational aids assembled by members of the 7th District Aids to Navigation Task Force sit ready on what was left of the Station Gulfport Sept. 16.

One CO's story

By BMCM Warren Woodell, CGC Clamp

The CGC Clamp was en route from Bayou Labatre, Ala., to its homeport of Galveston, Texas late in the month of August. While transiting in Mississippi Sound the Clamp experienced a main space fire in one of the ship's service generators and diverted to ISC New Orleans for repairs. Then it became apparent that Hurricane Katrina would be making landfall in the vicinity of New Orleans in the next few days.

The Clamp was chopped to Sector New Orleans and after repairs proceeded up the Mississippi River for safe storm moorings with the CGC Pamlico and small boats from New Orleans, Gulfport, Venice and Grand Isle, La. The Clamp and Pamlico's main functions were to provide safe moorings for the small boats and food, water and berthing for their crews.

During the course of Hurricane Katrina, which passed approximately 70 miles to the east of that location, there were wind gusts of up to 100 mph and ships and boats had to reposition themselves along the riverbank several times to maintain a safe position. After the passing of the storm, no significant damage was sustained by any of the units and all of the resources departed down river en route to New Orleans.

After arriving in New Orleans, units were tasked with assisting in evacuations from Chalmette, La., to the west bank of the river at Algiers Ferry Terminal, where evacuees would be further transported by buses to evacuation centers.

Evacuees were making their way to the Chalmette Ferry Terminal and were being transported by Coast Guard resources, ferries and commercial barges. The survivors that were arriving in Algiers were suffering from dehydration and lack of food and medicines.

For the first three days there was poor coordination of resources such as buses or trucks to relocate evacuees. Medical personnel from the Clamp treated people for an extensive array of problems from diabetic shock, coronary problems, renal shock, cuts, bruises and gunshot wounds. Triage was set up to prioritize people for medevac by Coast Guard helicopters with the assistance of a volunteer nurse from the Algiers area.

One evening, there were about 120 evacuees left at the Algiers site with only one bus left, which had been abandoned by its driver. It was determined to be too dangerous to leave the evacuees there overnight. In addition, there was no adequate food or water. Personnel from the Clamp and Station Venice manned the bus and started to relocate the evacuees to one of the centers. While trying to find a center that would take the evacuees, the Coast Guard personnel found another abandoned bus, which had a paraplegic and person in a coma inside. This bus was put into operation and picked up other evacuees along the way. During the night they found a place to drop off the

evacuees and returned to the cutter's location with the buses. Later, the buses were stolen by local people in the area.

Another time, assistance was requested by local law enforcement to clear an elderly care facility in the Algiers area. Personnel from the Clamp and MSST 91112 assisted in clearing the 500-room home and recovered several residents in extremely poor physical condition. The home had been looted and used by other evacuees since the storm. The people found were taken to medical facilities.

On day three, the CGC Spencer arrived in the New Orleans area and assumed On Scene Command. Fires had started to breakout in New Orleans and that night there was a large fire with explosions at a terminal facility adjacent to the Algiers area. This required temporary evacuation of the Coast Guard units until the fire sources and the toxicity of the smoke could be determined. Because there was no danger to personnel, units returned and resumed evacuations.

Over the next five days approximately 6,600 evacuees were brought across the river and further transported to other centers. Security had become an issue and at the request of local law enforcement personnel, people were being screened for any weapons, drugs and alcohol before being further transported to evacuation centers.

After evacuation operations at Chalmette/Algiers were completed, the Clamp departed for Morgan City, La., to pick up ATON supplies. During return to New Orleans the ship experienced another fire in the generator system and returned to Morgan City for repairs. After repairs were complete, the ship left for Venice, La., to assist CGCs Pamlico, Barbara Mabrit, Greenbrier and Hatchet in recovery operations and ATON repairs in the lower Mississippi River. The Clamp additionally was tasked with transporting tower equipment to Port Sulphur, La., to re-establish the Rescue 21 radio towers. After the delivery and arrival in Venice, La., ATON work was done, along with assisting in recovery operations at Station Venice. At this point Hurricane Rita was approaching and all units left.

The cutters Clamp, Hatchet and Greenbrier proceeded up the Mississippi River for hurricane moorings with small boats from Venice, New Orleans and Grand Isle. The cutters Pamlico and Barbara Mabrit proceeded east toward Mobile, Ala. The northbound units rode out the storm at the Baton Rouge harbor location along with the CGC Pelican, which had a damaged prop. The storm passed with sustained 100 mph winds and the Clamp and Hatchet proceeded to Calcasieu/Sabine, Texas, for recovery operations. The Clamp experienced two more mainspace fires in the generators over the next week and was released from operations. 🇺🇸

Canadian Beacon

Story and photos by PA3 Christopher Evanson, Lant Area



Nor'easter

The Canadian coast guard ship Sir William Alexander, homeported in Halifax, Nova Scotia, approaches a damaged weather buoy off the North Carolina coast. Weather buoys provide early indications of potential hurricanes. The Sir Alexander assisted the U.S. Coast Guard with repairing damaged buoys in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Operation Unison

An unfamiliar vessel sailed through the warm tropical waters off the coast of Key West, Fla. The hull made of double reinforced steel, red as an apple, prominently displaying a maple leaf for the world to see.

It was the Canadian coast guard ship Sir William Alexander, homeported in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The Sir Alexander is a 280-foot ice-breaking buoy tender that normally spends many winters laboring in the frigid ice-covered waters of the North Atlantic.

But this trip put the ship and its civilian crew far from home, steaming down the Atlantic Coast to aid their neighbors to the south, days after a nasty storm had taken a bite out of the States.

The Sir Alexander began its long voyage on Sept. 6, to aid and assist the Coast Guard in any way possible as the Gulf Coast lay in ruins after being devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The mission was called Operation Unison.

Upon arriving in Pensacola, Fla., eight days later, the ship brought relief supplies to aid victims affected by Katrina, and a fresh crew ready to get to work.

One week prior to the Alexander arriving in U.S. waters and before Katrina made landfall, winds reached record speeds in the Gulf of Mexico, causing damage to oilrigs and several weather and navigation buoys vital to United States commerce.

"Weather buoys help calculate weather such as

wind speed, wave data, humidity and barometric pressure. The navigation buoys assist in the safe transit of vessels entering ports along the Gulf Coast," said Patrick Bergen, an electronics technician with the

National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's National Data Buoy Center.

"Weather buoys are absolutely valuable to the country, because they are part of the hurricane warning system," said Ward Posey, chief of aids to navigation operations for Atlantic Area.

Soon after the Sir Alexander arrived, the mission was clear. Their orders were to replace and repair damaged weather buoys with the help of two NOAA technicians.

— Bryon Gibbons,
commanding officer

The Canadian coast guard crews allowed the Coast Guard to focus solely on repairing navigational aids and get some much needed rest.

"The Sir Alexander allowed us to give our cutters the maintenance that they needed," said Posey. "The crews lived in much of the areas affected by the storm, and many had had family matters to tend to," he said.

The presence alone for the Sir Alexander was very historic.

"This was the first time the Canadian coast guard worked in the Gulf of Mexico."

CANADIAN HELP

The crew of the Sir William Alexander, homeported in Halifax, Nova Scotia, pose for a group photo prior to their arrival back in Canada.



"This was the first time the Canadian coast guard worked in the Gulf of Mexico," said Bryon Gibbons, commanding officer of the Sir Alexander. For starters, the Sir Alexander primarily is an icebreaker; it is very rare that a ship with those capabilities would be needed in a warm, humid climate.

Unlike their U.S. counterparts, the Canadian coast guard is made up entirely of civilians. The ship operates with a small crew that functions like a well-oiled machine.

Many Coast Guard cutters are staffed with junior officers and junior enlisted fresh out of the Academy or boot camp. But on the Sir Alexander, the 30-man crew has over 300 years of sea service combined.

"You would be hard-pressed to find anyone on this ship with less than twenty years of sea experience," said Bob Billard, a quartermaster aboard the Sir Alexander.

The day-to-day business is similar to how the Coast Guard operates. There is a commanding officer and an executive officer the crew refers to as the chief mate. The deck department consists of six seamen and a chief boatswain who observes the daily deck work.

The engineering department consists of a chief engineer, oilers and winch men who maintain six-hour watches in the engine room. On the bridge there is always one lookout, a quartermaster and an officer-in-charge standing watch. The Sir Alexander is also equipped with a helicopter flight deck and hangar.

After receiving the call for assistance, the Canadian coast guard serviced and repaired six weather buoys over a one-month period ranging from the Alabama coast to Honduras.

When their mission was completed in the Gulf and Caribbean, the crew made a port call to Key West, Fla., for an evening before departing on the last leg of the mission, sailing up the Atlantic coast towards Halifax. Three more weather buoys awaited the crew before going home: two off the coast of North Carolina and the last off the Maine coast.

The crew of the Sir Alexander talk very little while they work. The years of experience that each man has make it seem like they can read each other's minds. They each have purpose and poise that come from more than a quarter century of sea time.

As the crew sailed toward home, the environment became more familiar to them. The air was a little crisper, and the seawater was a little darker; Canada was close by. The crew of the Sir Alexander, well aware



WEATHER UPDATE

Two technicians with the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration National Data Buoy Center in Stennis, Miss., repair a weather buoy off the North Carolina coast damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The two technicians traveled with the Canadian coast guard ship Sir William Alexander, a 180-foot ice breaking buoy tender homeported in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

that they were on a historic trip, did not view the U.S. operations any different than they would their own. One crewmember, steward Russell Mosher, said it best. "This isn't Canada helping the U.S. It's brother helping brother." ☘

Communicating in a crisis

ANALYSIS BY LT. ROBERT WYMAN, 8TH DIST.

Watching Hurricane Katrina head across Florida as a Category 1, and then back into the Gulf of Mexico on Aug. 25, one couldn't help but feel bad for the people of Florida who appeared to be in the crosshairs of yet another hurricane.

But by Aug. 26, as Katrina slowly tracked west, that sympathy shifted to concern, and the interest in the news and weather took a dynamic shift. As it became clear that Katrina had zeroed in on New Orleans and the

Louisiana/Mississippi coast, the 8th District Public Affairs staff shifted from being consumers of the news, to being responsible for reporting the news of the Coast Guard's involvement in Katrina.

By the night of Aug. 29 — as the extent of the flooding and damage became clear; as the unprecedented operational response swung into full gear; as the first dramatic videos of operations were broadcast; and as several hundred local, national and international media outlets began calling — the Coast Guard's public affairs policies would be tested at every level, and perhaps more so than at any other time in our Service's history.

The instant news world

The evolution of the Internet, along with the media's push to show live coverage, has created exponential changes in the public's expectations and demands for news.

"A disaster such as Katrina is exactly the wrong time for agencies to start establishing relationships with media organizations," said Mike Ahlers, senior producer, CNN. "That's where the Coast Guard came out on top. They had established relationships with CNN reporters and producers such as myself long before the disaster, and that paid off during Katrina. We knew who to call, and the Coast Guard knew who to call. We knew each other, and I think that made a lot of difference," Ahlers said.

The 8th District Katrina response Web site, www.uscgstormwatch.com, was viewed by almost 2.3 million people during the response. No longer does anyone wait for the evening news or the morning paper. Instead, there is a broad expectation by all publics and stakeholders that timely and accurate information will be available around the clock.

CAMERA TIME

The media interviews a Coast Guardsman in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.



This unprecedented visibility of the Coast Guard, and 24-hour interest in operations, placed significant

strain on the limited personnel assigned to fill the "information" role of the various incident commands.

Meeting all of those demands, while simultaneously shielding operators from the media crush and trying to avoid impacting Coast Guard operations, was a constant challenge.

Meeting the demand

One of the principal goals of the Coast Guard's public affairs program during a crisis is to be both the best source of information as well as the

first source — otherwise known as "maximum disclosure, minimum delay."

This approach to releasing information has historically done an exceptional job of keeping the public informed, and continually reinforces the proactive approach to public affairs at all levels of the organization.

To best do this, 15 public affairs personnel were initially assigned to gather and distribute Coast Guard information; capture video and photographic documentation of operations; coordinate media requests for interviews and ride alongs and complete the other requirements of the "information" role at the various Coast Guard incident commands in Alexandria, La.; Mobile, Ala.; and St. Louis.

This number of PAs grew during the response with upwards of 40 — almost half of the entire rating — serving in support of Katrina and Rita response operations.

Although providing this number of personnel from such a small rate was challenging, providing a team of full-time public affairs professionals alongside the inci-

dent commanders was instrumental in proactively feeding the information machine.

"During the Hurricane Katrina response, we were overwhelmed with media requests from all markets — radio, television and print," said Capt. Terry Gilbreath, the commanding officer of Marine Safety Unit Morgan City, La., and an incident commander during the hurricane response. "We would not have been able to manage this massive public affairs effort without an assigned public affairs team. Their assistance following Hurricane Katrina was invaluable in organizing, coordinating and preparing for numerous media interviews and broadcasts."

In an event of national significance, such as Katrina, where there is 24-hour global interest, if the demands for information are going to be met, it is imperative that a "push/pull" system be in place.

News and imagery constantly are "pushed" out by the PA staff through press, photo and video releases; there were more than 150 such releases of information during the response.

Just as critical, however, is the "pull" aspect, which provides a centralized place where all stakeholders can go for their informational needs. The 8th District response Web site filled this need and created a virtual meeting place where interested parties gathered their own information. It also gave visitors a chance to electronically submit questions, concerns or opinions.

One e-mail read: "In a time the nation and its citizens are crying for help, you have come through with courage and compassion. The nation and people of Louisiana and Mississippi are indebted to the Coastguards' (sic) hands of humanity laboring tirelessly in their time of needs. With immense appreciation for all that you do. You truly make the difference. God bless each and every one of you. You are the best!"

The Coast Guard always has had an open relationship with the news media. We trust that they will do their best to accurately interpret the information we provide and report the news fairly. Because of this long-established relationship, the media know they can come to the Coast Guard for information and for spokespersons.

Selecting spokespersons was easy, as the Coast Guard has always had a culture of communicating to our various audiences. This culture of communicating is reinforced through policy, policy that empowers every Coast Guardsman to speak on that for which he or she is responsible.

This programmatic approach is invaluable in a crisis, especially one in which there are almost as many members of the media in the field as there are responders. Whether it was a boat crew coming out of a flooded

neighborhood after a grueling shift, or an aircrew setting down at an air field, when the media showed up with cameras rolling — almost without exception — every member of the Coast Guard spoke professionally on what they did, why they were there, and why it was important.

And lastly, having the ability to show our efforts, though operational photography and video of our operations, is invaluable, not only for the immediate short-term media use, but also for the long-term historical needs of our service.

In addition to embedding Coast Guard PAs aboard aircraft and boats, we also embedded media at almost every level of operations, including on more than one occasion giving 24-hour access at Air Station New Orleans to a documentary film crew working with the Weather Channel who said that "... it was an honor and a privilege to meet and talk to so many of you during this historic moment for the United States Coast Guard. Thank you so much for giving us access to so many of your people at such a critical time for our country. I can assure you that you will be more than pleased with the final product."

The long-term impact

Actions always will speak louder than words. The amazingly heroic and dedicated efforts throughout the organization resulted in the saving of more than 34,000 lives. The public affairs response, however, contributed to helping the public better understand the "why" behind every Coast Guard man's and woman's efforts.

By being aggressively proactive with outreach; by diligently working toward shooting imagery and embedding the media to show the public what the Coast Guard was doing; by making Coast Guard rescuers available to the media; and by empowering all responders to speak to what they were doing, the public affairs program helped increase the public's awareness and understanding of the Service. It helped build credibility in the Coast Guard's abilities, it created new relationships while strengthening existing ones, it met the demand for timely, accurate information, and ultimately it helped to reassure the American public that efforts were underway to help the impacted people of the Gulf Coast.

The long-term impact of this visibility on the Coast Guard as an agency is incredibly difficult to gauge and may never be known.

But immeasurable value can be found in the hand-colored "thank you" card from a 4th-grader in Fremont, Calif.: "Dear Coast Guard, it is good to save people because they could have died. The hurricane did a lot of damage, and you saved a lot of people. If I had to call anyone a hero, it would be you." ☛

Telling the Coast Guard story in Katrina's aftermath

By Tara Jennings-May, G-IPA

As the massive Hurricane Katrina rescue operations began along the Gulf Coast, Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Carter packed his bags and headed to Baton Rouge to set up the federal government's Joint Information Center.

"I came down with a blank check – express direction from DHS to get the Joint Information Center up and running and start aggressively telling the story," said Carter, the Coast Guard's chief of media relations whose previous joint information experience includes serving as press secretary for the principal federal official in the TOPOFF 3 exercise, supporting small-scale Joint Information Centers after Hurricanes Bertha and Fran at Marine Safety Office Charleston, and supporting Defense Department Joint Information Bureaus overseas.

The overwhelming public recognition of the Coast Guard's successful response to Katrina gave him and his team almost instant credibility and respect as they went about setting up the JIC on Sept. 3 at the Louisiana State Emergency Operations Center.

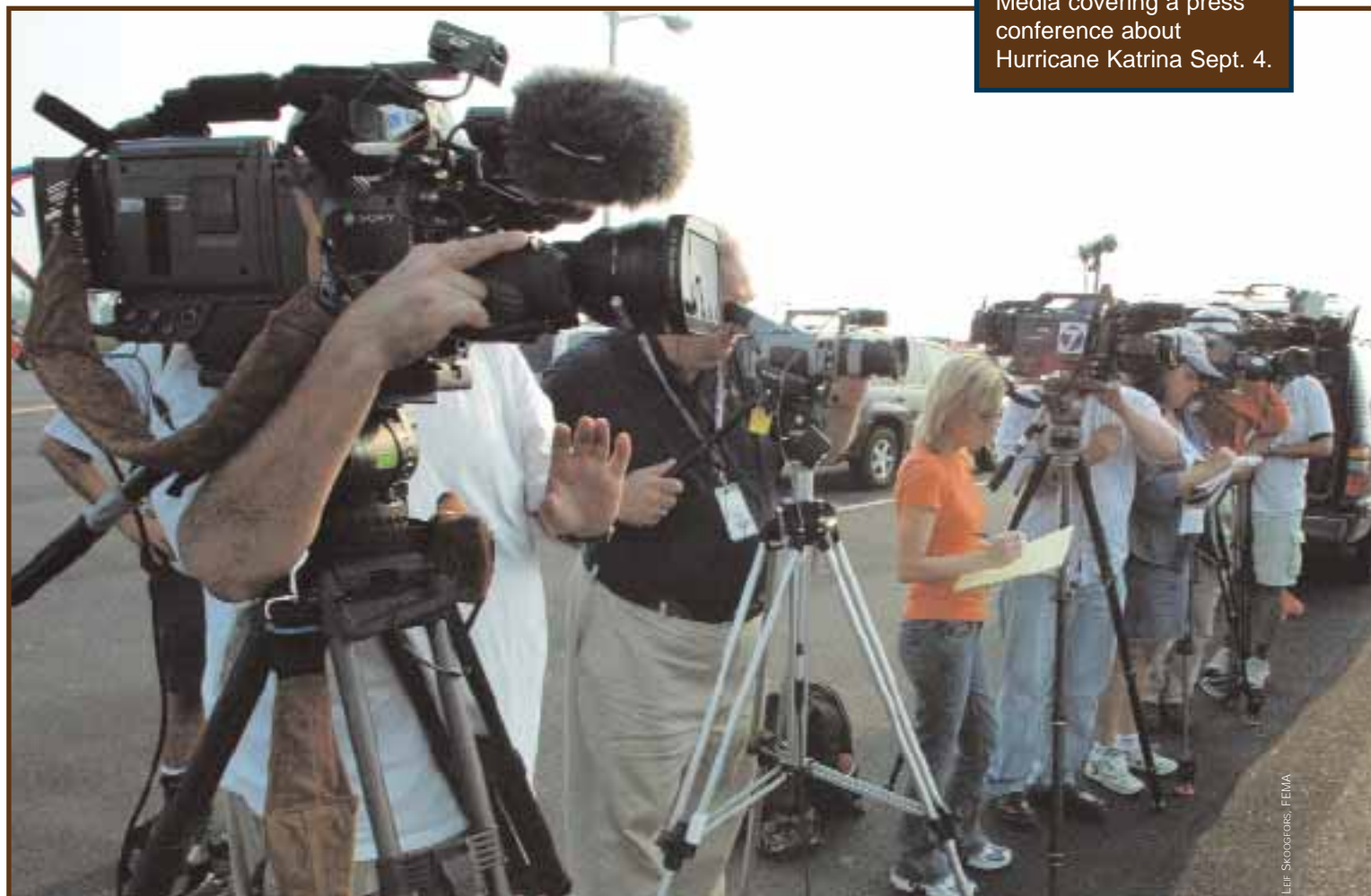
The initial challenge was obtaining resources--identifying space, people and tools to do the job. DHS staff identified skill sets and sent civilian public affairs specialists from across the government, including FEMA, Transportation Security Administration, Army Corps of Engineers, EPA, and Department of State, while several Air Force and Army personnel reported in from Northern Command.

The JIC staff was "an outstanding bunch of people that easily shared my vision of the operation," said Carter. He noted that some initially resisted operating outside their agency's chain of command, but Carter continuously emphasized that in this operation--the first large-scale execution of the national emergency response plan and principal federal official construct--the JIC staff reported through Emergency Support Function 15 directly to the DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs.

"I laid down the ground rules that persons assigned to the JIC work for the JIC first, and secondly

ALL THE NEWS

Media covering a press conference about Hurricane Katrina Sept. 4.



they are liaisons to their agency," said Carter, who emphasized the Coast Guard's PA mantra "if we own it, we're going to talk about it." He told them to be aggressive and forward-leaning and he would cover for them if needed.

After the first week in the state EOC, Carter was able to move his team into a Joint Field Office – a converted department store in Baton Rouge. He assigned one deputy to manage about 30 public affairs specialists, whose role included media monitoring, writing and research. The field office had a media center built out of it with another deputy and 15 public affairs specialists to do media engagement.

The JIC staff was in the field office for about a week when Vice Adm. Thad Allen, Coast Guard Chief of Staff, was designated the recovery operations principal federal official.

As JIC coordinator, Carter's role was to set the tone for media

LET'S TALK

Vice Adm Thad Allen, in charge of Katrina recovery efforts, addresses the media Sept. 21. Allen was touring Hancock County, Miss.



relations, facilitate news briefings in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, assign the appropriate people for interviews, and conduct background media work and behind-the-scenes administration.

His first news conference on Sept. 9 was the designation of Vice Adm. Allen as the PFO. Carter had an hour and 15 minutes to prepare, buying satellite time, bringing in a satellite truck, attracting national media and moving media from the state EOC to the JIC.

As Carter facilitated Allen's first news conference as the PFO on Sept. 12 in New Orleans, he heard Louisiana's lieutenant governor and the Jefferson Parish president offer effusive praise of Allen as they stepped in front of the cameras. "It demonstrated to me how quickly Admiral Allen was able to make allies in only his third day on the job," said Carter.

His final news conference in New Orleans was during his last week in state, in front of CGC Gallatin to show "commerce flowing on the Mississippi River." Former FEMA director Michael Brown had just testified before Congress earlier in the day; Carter noted to the assembled media that Allen would answer questions on almost any topic, but he cautioned reporters that he would not address Brown's testimony. An NBC freelance reporter laughed and stated, "That's okay, we know he's here for the surgery and not the autopsy."

Of his personal experiences in New Orleans, Carter said two particularly stand out. He was at dinner at a local restaurant with Secretary Chertoff, the DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, an admiral and several other Coast Guardsmen, all in ODUs, when a firefighter approached them after getting off a long shift just to say thank you for helping the people of Louisiana.

His second noteworthy experience involved the outstanding Auxiliary support he received. With no rooms to be had in Baton Rouge, Carter's headquarters staff reached out to Capt. Barry Smith, national director of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, who found a local Auxiliarist, Terry Mills, who housed Carter for his entire tour of duty. Mills, a deputy with the state fire marshals office, provided him with an air mattress in a spare room and coffee that seemed to be fresh no matter the hour. Mills even worked in the media center for a few shifts to give the JIC staff members a break. In return, Carter spoke at his flotilla meeting, and the two men have vowed to remain friends.

"It was professionally very satisfying and personally fulfilling to represent the Coast Guard in this," emphasized Carter, who returned to Louisiana in late October to serve as Allen's press secretary. 🇺🇸

The public responds:

These are samples of the e-mails sent to the Coast Guard from fellow citizens. They are unedited except for name deletions.

Thank you for all your help with the hurricane disaster. You guys have been the first ones out there helping people and saving so many lives. I think you guys/gals are the most awesome group of people!!!!

Tyra H., San Diego, CA

Dear Commandant Collins:

On Sunday, September 4, I was the 8th rescue operation of the day for Coast Guardsman Dave Foreman of the 8th District and his 7th District helicopter crew. Despite the fact that it was very dark, I was standing at the top of a spiral iron staircase, and a looter with a sawed-off shotgun was making his way down my block, Officer Foreman rappelled down to me, made sure my house was otherwise empty, and got us safely into the helicopter. We returned to the USCG station at Belle Chasse to refuel, and I was immediately surrounded by compassionate and efficient Coast Guardsmen who got me cleaned up, calmed down, and ready to be delivered to the army for transport to Charlotte, N.C. I wanted to thank you for providing what must be excellent training and support for these crews; they make the impossible look easy. Their thorough professionalism was matched by their extraordinary kindness, and at a time when my world was falling apart, they provided me with a model of courage and competence that I hope to continue to put to use as New Orleans recovers.

My local post office is not accepting mail addressed to New Orleans. I will write the 8th District when I can, but in the meantime wanted to let you know that your Guardsmen are doing wonderful work and that many of us are deeply grateful for it.

Very truly yours,
Catherine L.

This resident of a land-locked state just wanted to thank you for being the best of America at a critical time. Thank you!

Linda B.
Helena, Montana

After watching CNN coverage of the outstanding performance of the USCG rescue efforts in New Orleans, the only regret that I have is that my uncle is no longer alive to see his beloved Coast Guard shown on television in all their glory.

Commander John Clayton, from his proud stance on the deck of the "Paw Paw" in the 1950's until his retirement from his desk in Hawaii many MANY years later was a devoted member of the USCG.

In 1997, the USCG auxiliary base in Hull, Mass. honored my Grandmother (his mother) by sounding their boat horns off Boston Light during her harbor memorial service.

With great pride I gave a personal salute to the brave "Coasties" seen and unseen at work today in the service of our country. Well done!

Lesley B.
Farmington, Mo.

I want to tell you guys that you are doing a fantastic job in the gulf coast region. The American public needs to give you a great big thank you. If it were not for you people risking your lives, not just now but on a daily basis, there would be larger death tolls from storms. So to each and every member of the United States Coast Guard, thank you for what you do and for your dedication.

John B.
Fayetteville, NC

I thank God every day for the United States Coast Guard! I shudder to think where we ALL would be if we didn't have them. I hope and pray that the people of this great country realize what they do for us. The USCG is just another reason why I am so proud to be an American. For all that they do on an everyday basis and for all they have done during the terrible hurricanes that have hit this country I want to say Thank You, Thank You, Thank You.

N.D.
Florida, USA

Ladies and Gentlemen —

Your Aviators,Air Crew,and the less often cited but equally important Ground/Shipboard personnel are OUTSTANDING!!!!Godspeed to your personnel engaged in SAR OP's in the Gulf Coast Region.

E.J.
Cape Breton SAR Team Member

Just want to say thank you to the men and women who are actually helping those in New Orleans. I saw a Coast Guard worker save a dog. I was so touched because pets do help people and that is just an added plus for the family this Coast Guard employee saved. Pets help people deal with hard times. And New Orleans has seen HELL.

Thank you
Susan

I just want to thank the members of the U.S. Coast Guard for the wonderful work they are doing in helping to rescue people stranded by Hurricane Katrina. I am immensely proud of them and grateful for their service to this country.

I know that the Coast Guard is always active in protecting this country and in rescuing people in need, but we do not always hear about that. Only when tragedies strike do we see these courageous acts and realize how fortunate we are to have such fine men and women serving this country.

Please pass along my most sincere thanks.
Sandra T.

My name is Bill Yontz and I just wanted to say thank you for the HEROIC efforts your sailors are putting forth.

As a Marine veteran of a forgotten conflict (Beirut), I understand what it is to do your best and never be recognized. Know that you are in my thoughts daily and you will never be forgotten.

Semper Fi!
Bill Y.
Cpl USMC

I just wanted to let you know, that I am fortunate to be only watching the horrific footage of "Katrina" from the comfort of my home while I am watching all of your men work so hard in their efforts to rescue victims of this horrible tragedy. Watching all of you has made me feel so proud to be an American. No other country in this world has such dedicated and loyal people the way ours does. I just wanted to drop you this note to say "Thank you" for all you are doing to help everyone and may God Bless each and every one of you.

Joy M.
Long Island, New York

The Coast Guard Rocks!

Just wanted to drop you a line as an appreciative American.

Your actions during the Katrina rescue & relief efforts made me proud of my country and proud of my species.

Thank you for doing what you do so damn well. You are an inspiration of how it can work when people of integrity and commitment are in charge.

Best wishes to everyone in the Coast Guard.
Larisa W.
Seattle, WA

I do not know the correct site to send this message, but my family and I want to communicate our gratitude for the OUTSTANDING JOB the Coast Guard has done in the Katrina disaster!! You have been the most impressive presence in the situation, and have been one of the only rays of hope while watching this story unfold on TV. The men and women working these past days are every one a hero in our eyes, and we will forever hold the Coast Guard in even higher regard than we always have. I have always felt that here in Memphis the Coast Guard is our first and most reliable source of defense in this precarious world, and they are doing valuable work daily in protecting our Mississippi River resources, bridges, etc.

We do not communicate our appreciation often enough for the work you do. Thank you for always providing IMMEDIATE and HEROIC response to the needs of our citizens. We are very proud of you all.

Pamela F., Germantown, Tenn.

I live in Walpole Mass and I am well aware of the work that the Coast Guard does to rescue and protect the lives of people in need and distress. It is work that is often done without much notice, except by those being rescued. A boat sinks off the coast of New England and the Coast Guard is there. Coast Guard pilots pushing their helicopters to the limits of fuel and safety to get to the those in need. Coast Guard teams jumping from helicopters into unbelievable conditions without hesitation. Coast Guard ships leaving a safe port to save people they have never met.

After Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast the Coast Guard was there. The first images I saw were of the helicopters with that familiar stripe pulling people up from rooftops. Thousands were saved because of the effort, and the heroism, of men and women who went when they were called.

God Bless and protect all the men and women of the United States Coast Guard.
Sean

Hello,
I wanted to say a huge "Thank God!" and an even BIGGER "Thank you!" to all the people in the Coast Guard for the help they have given and are giving to the tragic victims of Katrina.

There's so much else I would like to speak of and will add only one thing: the citizens of these United States have clearly seen who the heroes are and who actually helped.

God bless and keep you safe,
Carol D.

I could not let another day go by and commend the USCG on what an incredible response you have had in regards to Katrina. I personally am so impressed I would even think of joining the ranks if I did not have issues that would keep me from being a part of the organization.

This country has a huge list of everyday heroes and today's men and women of the Guard in EVERY aspect are among them. God Bless you and please share this humble yet sincere comment with the troops.

Terry L.

I just want to say how brave and proud I am of your crews in the south for the job they are doing rescuing the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Keep up the great work.

Sincerely
Brian B.

THANK YOU and BRAVO, for the Coast Guard's hard work and dedication throughout the Gulf Coast. As I have watched the news coverage from my home in Indiana it seems that by far the brightest spot in the relief effort, especially in the earliest days after Katrina, has been the Coast Guard. Thank you for your service!

Lisa G.

The men and women of the USCG are doing a fantastic service to the nation in your work during the Katrina disaster. Your presence has been the one bright spot in the news reports.

My father served from 1939 to 1946 and often spoke of flood relief along the Mississippi corridor. His wartime duties were in the Pacific arena. I have a greater appreciation of his service now that I have seen what you all are doing for the country.

Well done, and many thanks.
Bridget R.

I was delighted to learn that Adm Allen has agreed to take charge of the rescue effort in New Orleans.

The Coast Guard ships and helicopters were first on the scene with effective techniques for rescue. They quietly did the job without red tape or political posturing. If the CG had the manpower available, I'm sure they would have brought in food and water and secured the Superdome within 24 hours of the disaster. Congrats to all CG people.

I just want to say a big "thank you" for all of the Coast Guard's hard work in New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Coast. I'm so glad that we have dedicated people like you to take care of us. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

You have kept my faith in the United States Government. Thank you U.S. Coast Guard for your heroism, persistence and imagination in rescuing thousands of people. As people who serve, I am sure you wish you could have saved more. Bless you and yours. Give each other hugs from one person with no coast bordering her state; you may never serve me directly, but you have served my fellow human beings and for that I thank you. Heather W., Phoenix, Arizona

I just HAD to say THANK YOU for all of the good works the U.S. Coast Guard is doing with the Hurricane Katrina Rescue and Relief effort!

Finally, the media has brought to this nation, and the world, the excellent standards and works the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard. I love you all! This isn't very military-like, but big hugs to each and every one of you! With best regards, Grace D.

Dear brave men and women of our Coast Guard, Thank you for all you have done and are continuing to do for the people of Hurricane Katrina. You have been heroes to so many. It has been incredible to watch your rescues in New Orleans on the TV. Thank you for being there 24/7 on the ground, in the water, and in the air for our fellow Americans who were/are so desperate. I hope some of you are taking the time to REST now, even though that may be very difficult to close your eyes.

Thank you, and may God Bless ALL of You.

Patricia H. and family

Please allow me the opportunity to comment that not enough praise can be given to the US Coast Guard.

The inspiration had come up in a telephone conversation as images surfaced of the Coast Guard's feats, during Katrina, and before Katrina that have been left unsaid. Therefore, it inspired the need to write something reflecting the difficulty and heroic challenges faced by the men and women of the Coast Guard, whether they are on the field pulling up people in choppers or anguishing over where to best give logistical support.

Deep words of praise and appreciative thanks to you all...

Mark D.

THANK YOU...THANK YOU..... THANK YOU

for your help in the aftermath of Katrina. It is one of your finest hours ... I live in Omaha and have watched news programs with coverage of the USCG. I feel for our fellow man and made a donation to the Salvation Army....there is not a lot I can do here but send some money. I thank GOD that people like you can help. My brother Mike McQuade retired from the USCG two years ago with 34 1/2 years service. KEEP UP THE GREAT JOB!!!

Thank you very much ... The men and women of the USCG, who responded so valiantly to the disaster in New Orleans and surrounding areas, are to be commended as the heroes of the past week. They exhibited the professionalism and courage to help their fellow citizens when all else seemed lost.

I am from the San Francisco area and have seen the USCG at work many times and I was always impressed. Now I am just overwhelmed watching these public servants perform so well in the most difficult of circumstances.

A very grateful taxpayer,
Dr. Peter F.

A salute to all of the men and women of the U. S. Coast Guard. Once again, you have added a chapter to a glorious history. Your motto "SEMPER PARATUS" was never more lived up to. Of all the service branches, you are the most often forgotten. As an old Marine, I have always had the utmost respect for the ideals you display. May God Bless your efforts.

SEMPER FI ! Ed D.

Thank you so much for your amazing efforts during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to save so many thousands of our neighbors along the Gulf Coast.

You all have worked tirelessly under difficult conditions ... especially those who are stationed in the area hit by the hurricane and have lost so much yourselves.

The positive images of Search and Rescue crews pulling survivors off rooftops...out of floodwaters...gave hope to all Americans.

Thank you for being there for all of US.

Gail A., Fargo, N.D.

I am e-mailing to send feedback on what I saw on TV with this disaster in New Orleans. I saw Coast Guards on DAY ONE to NOW — HELPING FOLKS! Nothing LAZY about you all! I saw from day one, your men working hard and saving lives. I and others never really think about the coast guards, because we live inland.

So us lay folks know nothing about you coast guards truthfully. But after I saw you on TV, I kind of would like you over every operation in governmental affairs for now on. Why? You are quick, organized, not to mention hard-workers, plus you showed care and concern for those folks in the attics you had to cut out. All I saw was quality with your group.

YOU SHOULD BE AWARDED MEDALS OF HONOR FOR YOUR entire DEPARTMENT FOR YOUR QUICK RESPONSE TIME and HARD WORK! The nation was 'AWWWWWWWWWED' at your quick response time, and care, plus hard work. We saw your people lift one, then another, and then many more. Until the TV audience just knew that the coast guard fellows had to be worn out. But it was a PROUD THING TO SEE YOUR OPERATION. You were very ORGANIZED and dedicated! I think you should run Homeland Security for our nation. My opinion, I never saw such hard working and organized fellows in government in all my life!

Lord, I hope Congress and the Senate give you all much MONEY, to protect us all, you are the BEST!

It made us in the TV audience feel very proud of you.
Nancy F.

AFTERMATH

AST3 John Calhoun, Air Station Corpus Christi, was one of more than 4,000 Coast Guard personnel who responded to the relief efforts in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Photo by Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Tobiasz,
Air Station New Orleans

